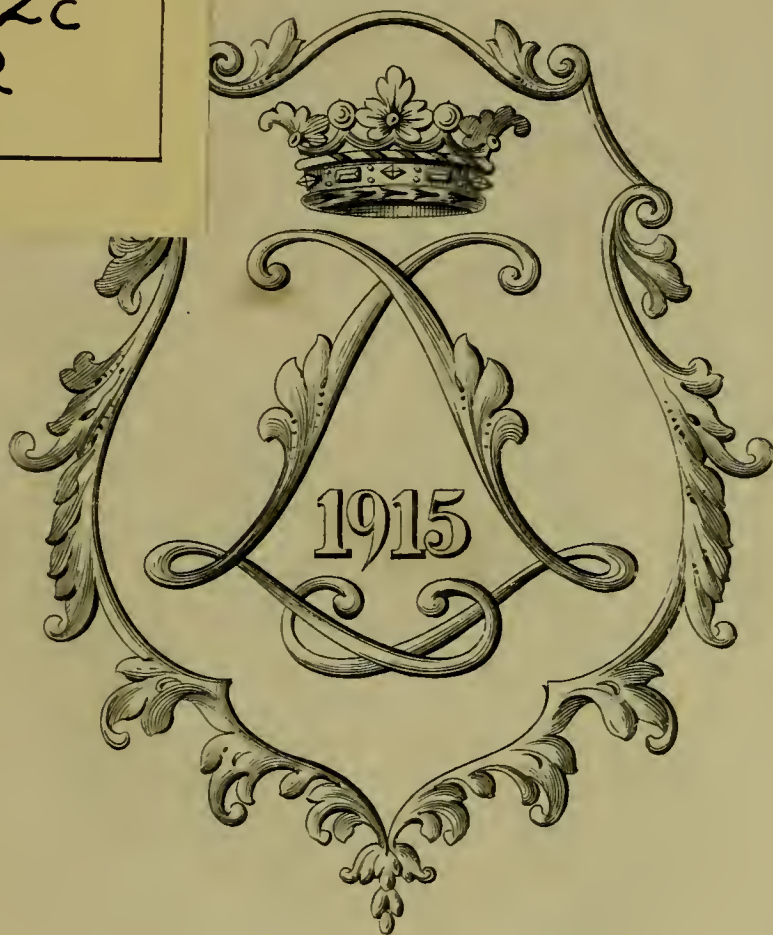


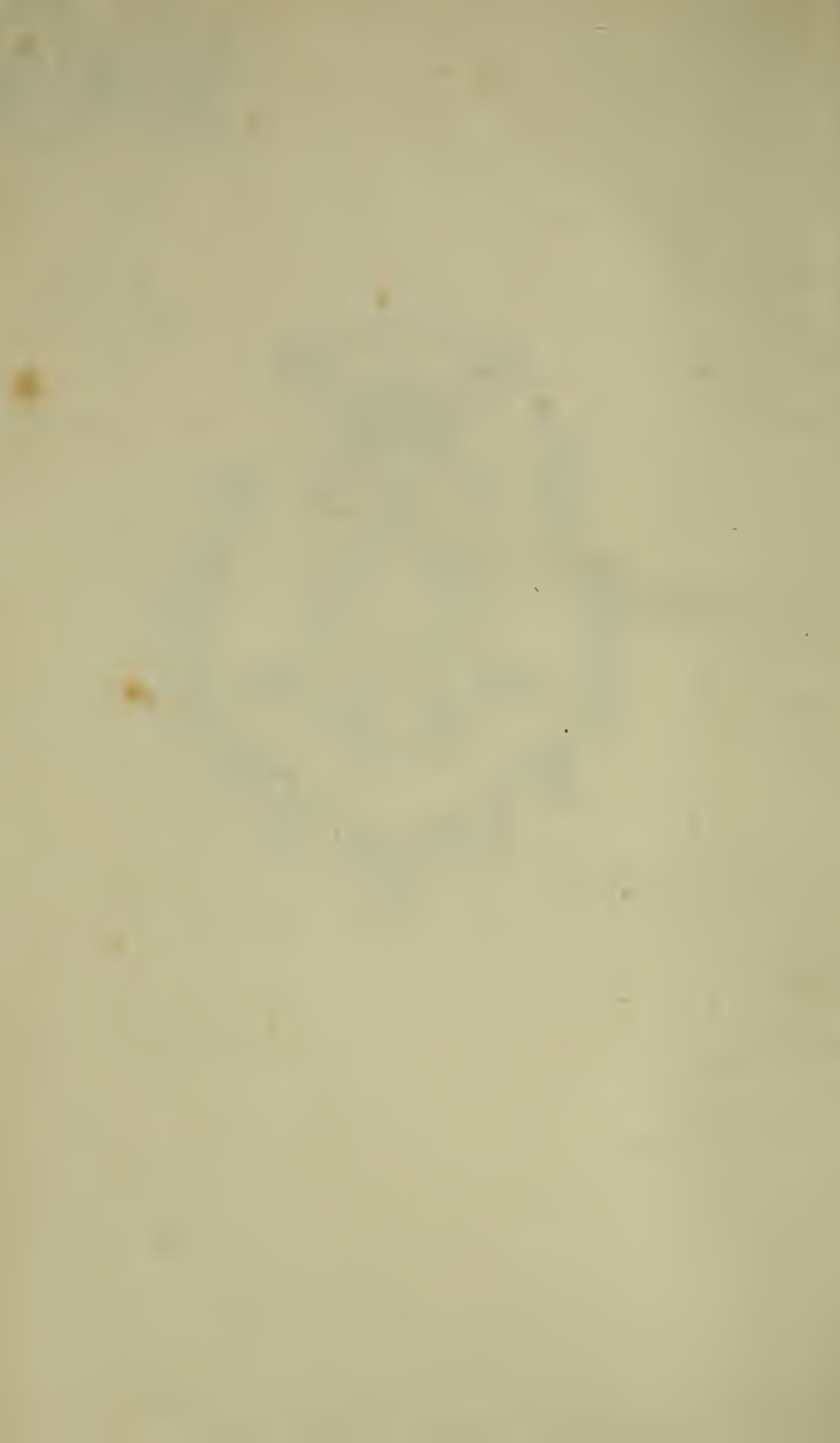


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CHICAGO

CONFESSIONS

OF

AN OLD MAID.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY, DORSET STREET.

CONFESSIONS

OF

AN OLD MAID.

“ Now, good sisters, you do me wrong, marry, do you, if you think I would say aught to shock your self-love; trust me, I respect your delicacy too much to be guilty of such misdoing.”

OLD PLAY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1828.

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C O N F E S S I O N S

OF AN

OLD MAID.



BOOK THE SECOND

CONTINUED.

CONFESSIONS

OF AN

OLD MAID.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON WHICH VARIOUS MATTERS DEPEND.

THE door of my house was opened by old Margaret: she was dressed in black, and exhibited a most woeful visage. “Why, what is the matter, Margaret?” I exclaimed, as soon as I had entered the passage, and the carriage was dismissed, “what, you thought I was dead, I suppose, when you lost me so unexpectedly! If you did, you were not very far off the mark in your conjectures: I have been, and am indeed now, *almost* dead.”

“Oh, my dear young lady,” (she almost

always addressed me by this appellation) “I have been sadly alarmed about you, that is true:—but the mourning in which you see me is for poor old Cuthbert,” said she, putting her handkerchief up to her eyes.—“Poor good old man! is he dead, then?”—I was inclined myself to shed a tear to his memory; but shall not sentimentalize any farther, than to express that I felt unfeignedly grieved at the loss of so faithful and respectable a domestic; one who had grown grey in the service of my family. The old man had never ceased from his regrets ever since the breaking up of the family establishment on the death of my father, and was constantly complaining about the alteration of his own situation, and that of his fellow domestic, Margaret.

These regrets, together with his own infirmities of body, soon sent him to his long home. As he was of course quite a privileged person, he used to make no scruple of going on maunding to me about the old mansion, and the good days that had been spent in it years gone by. As his complainings brought back to me

many painful recollections, my old domestic frequently rendered himself an annoyance to me; and when he was once in the middle of a strain of this sort, there was no getting him out of the room: reminiscences crowded on reminiscences, and drivelling upon drivelling, so that his presence used sometimes to be a cruel penance to me.

Margaret was not so old by eight or nine years as the steward, and consequently not so doting, though at times she used to be grievously tiresome in the same way that he was. What amused me in both of them was, that they still obstinately adhered to wearing the same dress, and calling themselves by the same official designations that they had been accustomed to bear in their more exalted circumstances. The old steward still wore a steel chain round his neck, with the pantry key, formerly the buttery key, attached to it. He wore too, the same kind of suit as that which he had worn in his stewardship—a coat with skirts preposterously long and wide,—a waistcoat reaching nearly down to his knees, made of

a light blue cloth, with large plated buttons—small clothes matching with his coat—blue stockings, and shoes square at the toes, with high heels, and broad plated buckles over the instep. Altogether, with his ruddy complexion and long silvery hair, he made a very respectable appearance.

Margaret, who besides acting as my mother's maid, also filled the office of housekeeper, would still parade about my petty premises with a diminutive bunch of keys jingling at her girdle, in place of the great heavy cluster of which she used once to be so proud—leading the whole house after her in conscious dignity, like the bell-wether that conducts the flock. Still did she call herself the “house-keeper,” and would talk of the “store-room.” Poor old woman! what were the stores of which she now had charge? A little pepper and salt, a small quantity of spices and grocery, and a few sweetmeats—in the place of huge cupboards filled full of comfits, preserves, and cates of all sorts, into which sacred depositories I used as a child to delight to peep, when Dame

Margaret condescended, as a great treat, to show me the store-room.

She wore the same grotesque white bonnet that she had been accustomed to consider so respectable in times past: it was of dimity, and of a huge size. It seemed much such an one as you may see exhibited now and then in a pantomime, and doomed to be mauled about by the clown, till it is at length transformed into an umbrella or a sail. In front of it, a great awning of fringe hung down to overshadow her eyes. The width of the bonnet could have been little less than two feet. Then she wore a long waist, thickly cased in an armour of whalebone, at the termination of which her attire bulged forth to a prodigious breadth over the hips; so that it was as much as my house-keeper could do to convey herself safely through the comparatively small apertures of the doors of my abode in London. If ever I suggested to her that her dress was better appropriated for allowing her to pass through the wide-framed oak doors of the old mansion, she would put her apron corner to her eyes, and protest

that if she were not allowed to continue the *dress*, at least, to which she had been accustomed, she must infallibly break her heart.

She was now of course anxious to hear all that had happened to me, from the time that she missed me at Lyndhurst. She prefaced her inquiries by saying that she had sent persons about the country, to endeavour to bring tidings of me; and when none were brought, she had considered it best to repair home to town, and there await my arrival whenever that might be.

Upon the recital of my adventures, she seemed to think that as Lord Frippington really loved me, it would have been better, had I listened to his proposals of marriage, than that I should live single any longer, subjected to so much annoyance as I was, from the importunity of so many admirers. This advice seemed very reasonable, but I found myself unable to comply with it, when I considered that if I did, it was possible I might be called upon to fulfil the promise which my early love had plighted. Margaret said nothing more upon the subject, but seemed

to think that my resolution might be kept a long time before it met with its reward; perhaps, until it would be of little avail to be willing to alter it. I saw by her looks what she would say: they bespoke that she thought me rather rashly obstinate. Of this I took no notice, and found approbation in myself for the constancy with which I was behaving.

One or two letters had arrived for me during my absence. I could not conceive, on first taking them up, from what quarter they could come, and was surprised to find, on opening them, that they were love epistles from my rival admirers, the hypocrite Sanctum, and the vulgar navy captain. They had learned my address, no doubt, from hearing me mention it to Lady Kate, at the parsonage-house. Their contents, if they excited my indignation, certainly excited my amusement as well. The Captain's *billet-doux* ran thus:—

“ To Miss Clorinder *Mirerbelle*. ”

“ God bless your pretty heart ! *I*’ve thought of nothing but your sweet face ever since I

saw you. I don't pretend to say fine things, but I tell you what—there's not a stouter sailor than *me* in all the Royal Navy, by G—d! though I say it. Do make up your mind to come and take up your birth along with me, in my cabin here at Southampton,—and spite the parson! Your's at command, till death,

“JOHN WRENCH, R.N.

“P.S.—My left eye is still bunged up, but I can see daylight out of my right; as for my chops, (!) they are still black and blue from the parson's thumping.”

The following is a specimen of Sanctum's epistle:—

“In the name of the Lord—unto Clorinda
Mirabelle, from Hezekiah Sanctum.”

“The godliness of love doth so inspire my breast, that communication with thee is irresistible. Abraham took Sarah unto him to wife, and I would do the same by thee, in the name of the Lord, thou sweetest one! Come, then, let me woo thee! My soul yearneth for

thee—my spirit boileth like a flaming cauldron after thee. Would that I were a dove, that I could flutter unto thee, and find a nest in thy bosom. Thy breath is even sweet as myrrh, aloes, and cassia, and thy cheeks like unto the roses of Sharon. Bless thee, in the name of the Holy One of Israel, thou ever dearest one ! My sister greeteth thee,—yea, Rebecca greeteth thee fondly. Oh ! listen then unto the voice of my supplications, and pour the balm of thy consent in, unto my soul. Thy spirit-afflicted admirer,

“ HEZEKIAH SANCTUM.

“ P.S.—The Philistine, Wrench, swore, in unseemly language, that he would write unto thee. Listen not unto the child of sin ; whom the Lord gave me, his servant, power to chastise, as thou sawest. Verily, the red right arm of the Lord was then manifested, as against the Moabite of old.”

I was surprised that Sanctum, in writing a love-letter, had not adopted the rhapsodical style which he had shown me he *could* adopt.

Perhaps he wished me to forget this, and considered canting to be the safest way.

To quit the mention of these vulgar people, and to return to my noble admirer,—it was some time before I could think of forgiving him for his outrageous conduct. He sent me sundry contrite epistles, but I was unmoved: from letter-writing he had recourse to another method of appeasing me, which was that of serenading. This method had as little effect upon me as his communications by post. I used to sit very unconcernedly listening to his music, and left him to shiver under the cold moon, while I sat laughing by the fire-side at the absurdity of lovers in general; nevertheless, very well satisfied *in petto*, at the power of my own charms.

It was just about this time that Lady Kate called on me, and gave me the intelligence of her uncle, Lord Frederick's, death. She, as his favourite niece, had been handsomely remembered in his will, and it was from this period that she established her head-quarters in town like myself, and also established, more

firmly, that intimacy between us, which, I must repeat, will cease only with our lives.

She was “a great match” for any body, and wanted not her admirers any more than I did. But she could not bear the thought of forfeiting her independence, and shackling herself to the matrimonial post ;—besides being unable to feel any tenderness for any one, as I have already observed. For so great were her satirical propensities, that she found something so ridiculous in every one that wooed her, that it was scarcely possible she could ever have respected any body as a husband, and so determined to remain single. Many, indeed, who paid her their addresses, left her in dudgeon at the ludicrous manner in which their serious proffers were treated, themselves burlesqued, and their tragedy of passion turned into farce, and in this respect we were good allies to one another.

An opportunity was afforded us about this time, of forming a treasonable confederacy against my prudish cousin, Miss Elflyn,—to the mention of whom I shall now occasionally re-

turn. In her, another “great match” was offered to those, who might wish to be “connubial,” provided it was to their own advantage. Her mother having lately died, she was left her own mistress, with a handsome fortune; but then her odious manner and unsociable qualities, her uncharitable disposition, uniform crossness and prudery, so much disgusted people, that they hesitated long before they advanced to her with proposals. Besides possessing in herself so many disqualifications to matrimony, she bore a universal dislike to almost every body in the world, and looked on all that might pay her their addresses, with spite and malignity; inasmuch as she felt their love was not cherished for herself, but for her money. Then her person too.....I have said enough of that already.....really, the man that was to take her for his wife, had need of the most extreme indifference and insensibility to find his condition supportable:—so that there appeared to be every chance against her changing her maiden name, in spite of her riches.

This question afforded matter of curious

speculation to Lady Kate and myself, and we were malicious enough to follow up our discussion upon it, by proposing to teaze my dear coz. by now and then sending her a cast-off lover of our own. I admit that we were acting wrongly in our amusement, because I am willing to acknowledge that the principle of it was malicious: but the results might possibly have been, not only to her, but to some one or other of her suitors, most beneficial. If the lady obtained a person who was amiable, of talent, or of rank,—surely, a great blessing would be conferred on her; on the part of the gentleman, if he was not rejected, he would at once be rendered affluent by the alliance, and though he had a disagreeable wife, he might still enjoy agreeable society. So that there was a good deal to be said in defence of our project, with reference to whichever party its operation would affect.

The success with which it met, in the first instance in which any fair trial was given it, was beyond our most sanguine expectations; how soon it was arrested, I shall not anticipate.

To have begun the farce by the agency of such persons as Wrench and Sanctum, would have been useless, as they were not calculated to gain the *entrée* to a person of so exalted a condition as my cousin Elflyn. So we waited just at present until an opportunity offered itself of sending some character or other, who was likely to conduct it with *éclat*.

Any admirer whom we sent to her, was easily afforded an introduction to her either at my own house or Lady Kate's; for Miss Elflyn, although she hated us both, yet for form's sake would now and then favour us with her presence on the occasion of a party.

CHAPTER XIV.

COUNT RODOLPHO BOLUSANI.

IT happened that I had been imprudent enough to sit in a draught of wind, after dancing one evening at a crowded ball; and in consequence caught a violent cold, which made me very ill, confined me to my bed-room, and prevented my going out for some days.

Dr. Bolus, (as I shall call him,) a young physician, attended me on this occasion: he came regularly every morning to see me, look at my tongue, feel my pulse, prescribe and utter a good deal of apothecaries'-hall palaver, while receiving his fee, with a look as wise as Minerva's owl.

One morning, after he had left me, I perceived by the side of my pillow a scrap of

paper; it was the back of a note; on one side of it was an old prescription, and on the other an address to myself; the purport of which was much in the following strain:—

“Most lovely and adorable Miss Mirabelle,
“Ever since my attendance upon you, I have been in a state of nervous irritation, debilitation, and indisposition, which no medicine can remove. Alternate flushes and *rigors* have been the chief symptoms of my complaint; my pulse sometimes up at 100, and my tongue furred. I prescribed for myself—*pil. calom. gr. vii. bis die cap. et nitr. gr. xxx. in aq. tep. solv. omni nocte*, but found no relief whatever. I am therefore induced to come to the conclusion that the remedy for my complaint is to be found only in yourself, which, unless you vouchsafe to grant soon, I am under strong apprehensions that my brain will be affected. But should you be inclined to favour my suit, you will at once afford an opiate to my nervous irritation, soothe the system altogether, and

gently induce a complete sedative to all morbid affections of the unhappy invalid.

“ Your desperate admirer,

“ EMPIRICANE BOLUS.”

I was even more incensed at this new instance of amorous impertinence than at those I had already been plagued with ; and the next time that he called, I desired him to desist from coming to see me any more, asking him at the same time what he could mean by such insolence, as writing love-letters to me, and recommending him in future to address them to some apothecary's daughter as a much fitter object for them.

However, recollecting my plot with Lady Kate, I softened my tone as he left the room, and detained him a moment, to suggest that he would have little farther occasion for paying visits either to myself or any other female patient, if he could manage to insinuate himself into the good graces of a single lady, (far richer than I could boast myself to be,) who lived in such

and such a street, close at hand, directing him of course to my amiable cousin. I suggested too, something about the qualities of dullness and credulity which she possessed to no small extent. Most persons who are prudes, are also not over-endowed with brightness—because, if they were, they would not be prudes: and in laughing at Miss Elflyn, I also wish my ridicule to attach itself to those similar character with herself.

Dr. Bolus left me in a pet; but, as it seems, thought too well of my suggestion to suffer it to be thrown away upon him. The man being a good deal of an humourist, and possessed of a most unshrinking impudence, the idea, when he thought more of it, pleased him so much, that he lost no time in acting upon it. Accordingly, he introduced himself as Count Rodolpho Bolusani, attached to one of the foreign embassies, whose family he vowed was derived from the same ancestors as that of her own father, upon which account in particular, he had thus studiously sought out her acquaintance. He played his part so well, with so much address, and

plausibility, that he was in no bad way to succeed in his undertaking, especially as he enhanced himself in the good graces of the lady by a feat of prowess worthy of the best times of chivalry.

Ensign Crone—now indeed become Lieutenant Crone—had, after his repulse from me, been assiduous in establishing himself in the favour of my cousin, which his perfidiousness had so justly forfeited ; and he was desirous to know, “ who the devil the fellow could be,” that seemed likely to undermine him in the affections of his fair one.

This desire to find out “ who his rival might be,” was not yet to be gratified in *every* respect ; but hitherto, only in an experience of this new suitor’s powers of cudgelling. In plain English, the Warrior received a good thrashing from the usurping Count ; and I cannot help imagining, that matters fell out thus, in consequence of an intimation from myself to the Count, “ that if he acted with resolution, he would be sure to remove any aspirant to the object of his ambition, she being a jewel who was

guarded by a military dragon, not quite so fierce as that which once on a time watched over the Hesperian apples."

When Miss Elflyn heard of the disgrace of her "man of valour," she discarded him, as she *then* said, for ever, from all pretensions of meeting with favour from *her*; whilst his vanquisher was, on the other hand, no less exalted in her esteem.

At length it happened that a lady who came to pay Miss Elflyn a visit, just at the time when Count Rodolpho Bolusani was urging his suit, perhaps even to the point of its ultimate success, accosted him by the name of Dr. Bolus, and began reciting a bulletin of the health of her two little girls, the youngest of whom was then cutting her teeth and "very fractious indeed!"

The Count pretended to put off these remarks by some evasion or other, in a pretended broken English, which he had assumed during his courtship; but as the lady still went on with her subject, most pertinaciously inquiring about the nature of the last draughts he had pre-

scribed for her; he was obliged to take himself off, swaggering out of the room with as good a grace as he could; though glad, no doubt, the moment that he found himself outside the street-door, (being then on the right side to run away,) to shuffle home to his pills and plaisters, as quickly as he could.

The poor Lady who had been the innocent cause of his discomfiture, with great simplicity made it plain to Miss Elflyn how very little the Count really was what he professed himself to be, and that his broken English, as well as his foreign style and appearance, was all “put on.” A prude deserves a little punishment of this sort, now and then; and my cross, dull cousin was punished pretty severely by the ridicule which this instance of credulity brought upon her, and the consequent shock thereby occasioned to her prudish feelings. However, I could mention an instance of credulity on this subject, exhibited a little time ago, that eclipses Miss Elflyn’s all to nothing.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINE ARTS.

A MINIATURE painter, who had been much patronised by Lady Kate's family, possessed a very choice though small collection of paintings, a Gerard Douw or two, a Salvator, and two or three heads by Spanish artists, one of which a St. Cecilia, was so beautiful, that now and then it afforded an inducement to Kate and myself to visit him for the purpose of seeing it.

She had a wish to have a miniature taken of me, and we accordingly called at the painter's, and while she was admiring his cabinet, I was sitting down to have my likeness taken. I do not wonder at any being of flesh and blood, in the capacity of a portrait-painter, feeling rather warmed in the exercise of his art, by the beau-

ties which are constantly being subjected to his minute and lingering scrutiny. Sir Joshua himself is said to have flung down his palette, and occasioned his fair employer to run out of the room covered with blushes, and saying that she had been made an offer by him. Some such scene as this happened, on the present occasion, in my own instance; but my limner was more enthusiastic, or at any rate less well-behaved than the great artist just mentioned, for he not only thought proper to declare the fervency of his passion, and utter vows calling on me to favour it, but also flung his arm round my neck, and showered a profusion of kisses over my cheeks, eyes, lips, nose, chin, to the amount of about five hundred, in two minutes.

In my own defence, I clawed his face with one hand, and rapped his head as hard as I could with my parasol, which I held in the other, screaming out to Lady Kate to come to my assistance: this she lost no time in doing, and the audacious painter having thus bestowed sundry kisses on me, till he was fairly out of

breath, thought proper to desist, whilst I burst into tears with rage and confusion : Lady Kate showered on him reproaches for his shameful and indelicate behaviour. We left him with assurances that he should repent his conduct, and it was not till he had repeated again and again the most earnest protestations of extreme sorrow and regret for his inexcusable rashness, besides having acknowledged the reception of a caning from a friend of mine, that he was countenanced again by those whose patronage he had hitherto enjoyed ; for the affair got wind with surprising rapidity, and was matter of agitation for some time.

The coxcomb painter, Signor Palletti as he shall be called, in further testimony of his contrition, insisted on making Lady Kate a present of my miniature, which he certainly executed beautifully ; and in order to appease me, entreated me to hang up the head of St. Cecilia in my house, which has been exhibited to the reader when introduced some time ago to my drawing-room.

Whether my pardon was ever fully granted

to a person who had given himself such airs, I cannot exactly say. One of the conditions imposed on him, by which he might hope to propitiate my clemency, was that of promising to run another chance of incurring disgrace, by attacking the fortalice of the maiden Elflyn. But I rather think he shrunk from his promise. Lady Kate also, about this time having rejected a captain of dragoons, by way of consolation animated him to set out upon this amorous campaign.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VISIT TO LINCOLN'S INN.

IN order to be nearer my friend, Lady Kate, I thought proper to change my place of residence; and in doing so, behaved with rather more precipitation than I afterwards found was advisable. This I was taught to know by a visit from the landlord of my former house, who came to inform me that in consequence of my not having given him sufficient notice of my intentions of moving, he must request me to pay for six months more rent, than I at present seemed aware he was entitled to claim of me.

As I had been totally ignorant of the extent of notice which I ought to have given; and had not thought it necessary to give more than that of a week or two, I was in no small

degree surprised at this sweeping demand : and as the rent was outrageously high, I did not feel inclined implicitly to pay down the money, until I had consulted some professional gentleman on the law of the case.

I considered it, moreover, very rude and ungallant, besides being extortionate, of the proprietor, to ask a lady for a sum which she did not fancy herself entitled to pay—but I have since learnt that these house-builders are the greatest knaves in Christendom—his name was Josathan, which has to my ears a remarkably knavish sound. I hinted to the man, that I thought his conduct far from polite : when the fellow had actually the impudence to say, “ that politeness did not keep men in clothing and *victuals* : for his part, there *wasn't* a *civil-ler* disposed person in all England than himself, but he must *live* and make such profit as the law allowed him—that houses were very dear, and, in consequence of my not having given him due notice of my intention to quit, he had been prevented from letting his house on my going out of it, which would otherwise not have been the case ; and that, therefore,

unless I made such just compensation as he submitted he was entitled to, he must seek redress in a court of justice."

The impudence of the fellow to pretend to threaten a lady with an action! I heeded not the arguments of my landlord, but determined on consulting some higher and more safe authority than I considered his to be, on the subject. I wrote to my solicitor to apply to a barrister for an opinion on the subject immediately; but his delay provoked me so much, that I desired him to let me know instantly what barrister it was that he had consulted on my behalf; and the moment I had learned this from him, I got into my carriage, and set off to the barrister's chambers in Lincoln's Inn, in order to consult him myself.

The gentleman lived in the "Old Square," as I was informed: the dinginess of that region as the carriage passed through a great dark archway into the square, much discomfited me; it made me sensible of a Morphean drowsiness, after the first shudder of disgust had passed off.

I sent the servant up stairs to the gentleman's chambers with my card, and a message with my compliments that I wished to be permitted to speak with him a few moments. The servant was desired to bid me walk up stairs, and I was soon shown into Mr. Quibble's chambers. I call their occupant by this name, as he made his fortune by the exercise of that happy quality, which such title expresses.

There he sat, surrounded with dusty shelves, full of volumes all bound in a most dusky and repulsive-looking calf-skin covering—something like his own complexion. Parchments were there, piled up on a large writing-table covered with green baize, and many were the ink-stains that discoloured it. There were papers scrawled all over, some lying on the floor in all directions, like the leaves in the Sibyl's cave—others on chairs—others on the table. A great stone jug of ink stood in one corner of the room; and against the wall, nearer to the writing-table, was a smaller vessel of tin, containing the same liquid. In another corner of the room were quires on quires of coarse draft paper, and by

the side of these a huge heap of quills. A bundle of red tape was lying on the ledge of the bookcase ; books heaped one above another were spread open, dog's-eared and scrawled in the margin.

A newspaper was lying on the mantelpiece unfolded, as if the gentleman had been too much occupied to look at it. Hogarth, had the subject of his pencil been the interior of a lawyer's study, would assuredly have expressed the pressure of his "business" by some such indication as this. A scrap of hard biscuit was thrust between the bottles of the ink-stand, Mr. Quibble having put it there in his hurry, or perhaps for convenience sake, that he might munch while he was writing ; not being able to take sustenance like any other sublunary being. One of the bottles was occupied by red ink, the other by black, and into each was rammed a quantity of pens, hundreds of which, worn down to the very stumps, were strewed all over the table. A wig hung on a peg between the windows, and a barrister's gown was flung across the back of a chair, evidently

thrown down in a great hurry,—so deranged were its folds, so busy must the person have been who had discarded it.

“ Bid the lady walk in !” were the sounds which I heard previously to entering Mr. Quibble’s room : “ Take a seat, Ma’am, if you please,” were those that I heard from him, when I entered it : “ Beg your pardon—will speak with you in a moment,”—were the next. All were uttered in a hurried tone ; and those last sentences which fell from him, were spoken without his ever raising his eyes off his papers to look in my face as he addressed me. I sat in silence for about ten minutes, and began to grow excessively fidgety, but was willing to make excuses for the neglect shown me, since I observed the lawyer’s face was distracted with such profoundly hideous grimaces, that I took it for granted he was pondering on a case little less important than the Gunpowder Plot, at least. So I suppressed the expressions of impatience which I felt inclined to utter, and contented myself with breaking through my silence by a loud and protracted sigh.

This seemed to awaken the attention of Mr. Quibble towards me,—or ‘my case.’ He reluctantly laid down his pen—and after screwing his mouth up on one side, turning his eyes up to the ceiling, and rubbing his face down with both hands, he bent his eyes upon me, and begged “to be made acquainted with the circumstances of the case upon which I had called to speak with him.” These I briefly explained, adding, that it was quite abominable that extortion, such as was attempted to be practised on me, should be permitted to exist: and that it never should be allowed that ladies were to be treated in so unhandsome a manner.

The lawyer said nothing to these observations, but smiled. I continued “that I had directed my solicitor to consult him on the subject, but that it appeared he had neglected to do so!” Mr. Quibble still smiled; and when I had made an end of speaking, began, after a deliberate “a-hem!” or two, “Why, you see, Ma’am, the law is no respecter of persons; certain is it, that, in some cases, ladies have been indulged, where similar allowance is not

made, generally speaking, for other persons. For instance, women of condition have been uniformly permitted to *sit* instead of *stand*, during a trial:—here the Court *holds* that there is no objection to granting indulgence of this nature, inasmuch as the timidity and delicacy of the sex have had such an effect on the nervous system, as to render it next to an impossibility that the female should endure the fatigue of a protracted perpendicular position,” (I began to grow dreadfully fidgety); “but I know no case *whatever*, in which it has been allowed, that where the law expressly *states*,” (here Mr. Quibble looked wiser even than before, and turned his head on one side, shaking it very profoundly, his tone becoming at the same time more energetic, and his voice louder, —his right arm being raised up, and his left fist doubled. I kept my distance)—“where the law, I say, expressly *states* a *particular course* of *proceeding*, that such course should be changed, annihilated, swerved from, varied, altered, or evaded, in *any* way whatsoever—or in *any* tittle, however small—out of mere

compliment to the beauty, or the engagingness, or the accomplishments, or the softness of the sex—all, or any, or one, or more than one thereof—of or belonging, or in *any* wise appertaining thereunto—a-hem ! . . . I wish,” (he continued, shifting his posture, and lowering his tone) “ to be understood.—Women have at all times enjoyed indulgences from the law to a certain extent—wherever no positive enactment has been run counter to:—any thing short of this. For instance, women have not only had the indulgence at times, which I have already mentioned to you ; but where positive enactments cannot be evaded by courts of law, the legislature has on occasions interfered in their favour, and paid them the compliment of repealing, for their sakes, hard and grinding laws. Such we may observe is the case in the humane repeal of that most *inhumane*, and we may *justly* say, that most *unjust* enactment of 21st Jac. I. c. 27, relative to the concealment of the death of a bastard child (See what ladies get by going to consult lawyers !) which was made undeniable evidence of murder in the

mother, except—mind!—she could prove by *one* witness at least, that it was born *dead*:—well, this act has been, for the *entire* benefit of your sex, repealed by the salutary enactment of 43d Geo. III. c. 58, commonly called Lord Ellenborough's Act.

“ Again, common custom has shown its respect for the sex, in the instance of the abolition of the cucking or ducking-stool, named by Coke, 3 Inst. 219, the tumbrel, (which signifieth a dung-cart); which has been entirely laid aside by the courtesy of modern times and an improved state of civilization, though I fancy not at all restricted by the legislature, and therefore legally in force — but I am not certain as to this. Also, I ought not to forget to mention, the almost entire explosion of the notion and practice of husbands selling their wives, with a halter round their necks, in *market overt*;—a barbarous traffic, which I fancy will very rarely, at this period, be met with, or if at all, only in the most uncivilized parts of the country. When again, I might—”

I was so sick of this everlasting, wiseacre-

prosing of Mr. Quibble's, all to no purpose as it was, that I rose up from my seat with signs of the greatest impatience, saying that it was really a pity that he had not spared himself the trouble of talking so long when he appeared to be so much engaged—that if the law was against me, it was against me, and that was all, that I desired to know. I was therefore about to open the door and make my escape from him, when Mr. Quibble “begged leave further to observe,” that “he was glad to see that I fully perceived the justice of the case against me: that all he had said, was merely intended to reconcile me in some measure to the law; which, he had attempted to show, was not more obdurate to my sex than common justice required; and that, as for himself, he had wished to soften down my ideas of its rigour, and make it more tolerable to *me*, as a lady.”

If so, he had gone a monstrously round-about way to the accomplishment of his object, however civil or considerate he might have deemed it; nay, had he not entirely defeated it, by rendering me more angry and impatient than I

had been before? However, I thanked him for his intentions, and told him it could be of little avail his trying to soften down the rigour of the law, which could not be altered. If he could diminish the amount of money which I was obliged to pay, then indeed his lengthy polite peroration might be of some service; but otherwise, it had been but so much waste of breath and of time. I wished him a good morning, and left him to his papers, wisely twisting himself about, and screwing up his mouth in the profound way which I have already noticed.

I could not help laughing when again seated in my carriage, in spite of my vexation, at the plausibility with which the concluding observation of Mr. Quibble had defended the tedious palaver with which he had treated me. These gentlemen of the long robe have certainly a strange kind of cleverness of their own; it suits their own soil, their own professional region, and no other. I speak of the 'thorough-paced' regular lawyer: if any gentleman of the profession happens to be a man of general information,

one who has seen the world, and a man of shining wit, then the case is altered. But it rarely happens that a man of this description can bear the drudgery and practical toil of law: if he shows himself to have an extensive knowledge of literature, it is more than probable that he is no very *deep* lawyer, as the time given to the more fascinating pursuits of letters, has been subtracted from that which his graver legal studies ought to have engaged.

So at least I should think; though I beg leave to say, that wherever I attempt to speak upon anything connected at all with "the profession," I do not use my own authority, but borrow the sentiments and speak from the instruction of my old brother, who was bred to this honourable and dingy toil.

Amongst other reflections, I amused myself with contemplating the figure and appearance of Mr. Quibble. He was a stumpily constructed person, and looked much older than I understood he really was. His cheeks were pale and bloated, putting me much in mind of the disagreeable inflation of bodies in water—most

unwelcome to look upon. His forehead was “villanous low,” and shaggy eyebrows extended over the sunken sockets of his eyes. He was the only fat-faced lawyer whom I observed in passing through Lincoln’s Inn; all the rest that I saw of the legal fraternity, had faces as thin and sharp as hatchets. Every one of them was pale, sallow, meagre and emaciate—a miserable-looking throng. Verily, they deserve the rewards of their toil! They do not get remunerated for doing nothing—and little can be the enjoyment of their earnings—little the time, too, permitted for enjoyment, even could it be pursued. What a beauty, I thought to myself, must Mr. Quibble be in his wig! What a charming creature for a lover!

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE TO DO WITH THE LAW.

“WHAT a charming creature for a lover!” did I say, at the close of my last chapter? Little did I think that a mere sport of fancy would so soon present itself to me in the more substantial shape of a reality. Scarcely three weeks or a month had passed away, before I one day found the following curious epistle lying on my table:—

“To Miss Clorinda Mirabelle.”

“Madam,

“As term is up, I have at length some little time allowed me, to speak that, which I have been impatient to declare ever since I had the honour of seeing you. Now doubting not,

that you are of a ‘marriageable age,’ and at your ‘own disposal,’ I have no scruple in applying solely to yourself for a favourable hearing of my ‘suit.’ All the authorities on the subject, I am anxious to recommend to your notice, will show you how desirable the state of *femme coverte* is. I believe Blackstone though not received in court as authority, yet will show you sufficiently what her privileges are. I need not explain more fully, I think, what the feelings are, which have actuated me in addressing this letter to you—you will be at no loss to draw the conclusion. Upon your answer to this, I shall look with as much respect as on a writ,—e: g: of ‘subpœna.’ I have to add, that I demand from you no ‘consideration in respect of marriage,’ whatever, but that all my goods and chattels, personal and real, of every kind, sort, size, description, denomination, or use whatever, and all, or each, or any of them, or any thing appertaining to them, either in my own possession, or that of any one holding the same, or by my authority, or for my use,—are totally and entirely at your

own disposal, and for your use and enjoyment, in the event of marriage.

“ Your good and valid, and *bonâ fide*

“ Old Square.

“ Admirer

Lincoln’s Inn.”

“ BOTHER’EM QUIBBLE.”

At first I laughed immoderately at this epistle: then I felt inclined to be angry at the lawyer’s presumption; and then I fell to philosophizing. “ Suppose,” said I, “ I were to accept this ugly fellow’s proposal—to speak of his *ugliness* first of all. Lord! what difference will it make some years hence? when if I had wedded a handsome husband, he would be as ugly as Quibble, or perhaps more so! Again, when Quibble’s skeleton is, at a still more distant number of years hence, turned up from its grave,—will his skull betoken that he was a more frightful-looking being than the skull of some once, perchance, handsome mortal, rotting by the side of it? Not a bit. Both skulls must equally grin in corruption, and the features of their wearers be equally undiscernible. How vain, then, are those coxcombs of men, who pre-

tend to consider women insupportable, unless they possess the fleeting attribute of external beauty !” I hope I shall be forgiven philosophizing thus on dead bones, since I have the authority of one Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, for so doing.

Now, I declare, I *feel* what I say ; but nine persons out of ten will ask, “ What matters it to either man or woman, what the appearance may be of the one or the other—years hence, and in the grave ? the *present* is all that can matter in this scene, whose only excitement is *present* appetite and present enjoyment.” The objection is more selfish, than philosophical ; nevertheless, I will confess myself not very unwilling to yield to it.

“ Suppose, then,” I continued, “ I do not reject Quibble’s suit on account of his ugly mazard—what is the next objection to him that must come under my consideration ? Quibble’s musty, prosy, professional ways, and his humdrum monotonous mode of life ? Vanity, again ! How could a country go on without persons to expound the intricacy, and practise the mandates

of its laws? It must go to ruin: crime and oppression must luxuriate; and I could not, thought I, live in the quiet possession of my property, or even of my honour. Who, then, deserves better of his country than the lawyer? Who again imposes on himself more denial than he? Who sacrifices almost every enjoyment life affords, to acquiring and expounding that science by which society is governed, and kept in order, regularity, and happiness? No one! His life is one career of mortification for the benefit of his country; of painful, anxious toil: who, then, is a greater patriot, or a better Christian? Is it *his* fault that the law has such chicanery and barbarity of form and practice? No: it has been handed down to him in that shape; and much is the pain his youth has endured, to master its difficulties; and therefore he does but seek a reasonable recompense in obtaining a livelihood by the fruits of his toil. Is not such a man as this, a more praiseworthy being, a more exalted character, than the vapid idler in fashionable life, who, perhaps, despises the meritorious guardian of his

country's rights, as a mere drudge—an ignoble plodder?

In fact, I looked upon the lawyer's character and function, as most exalted and noble, when viewed in its proper light, and judged of impartially, and with a due discrimination as to what was laudable and venerable about it, and what was censurable.

I therefore wrote back a civil note to Mr. Quibble, thanking him for his good opinion, and the honour he had done me by making me the proposal of an alliance; but that I was unable to accede to it, as I was under a 'prior engagement,' which I was sure his sound sense, as a lawyer, (an equity lawyer especially, as he was,) would dictate to him, ought to be preserved by me inviolate.

Of course, I expected that this sensible answer would have the desired effect of silencing Mr. Quibble's addresses;—but so far from acting with that good sense and coolness of judgment, which I supposed he would, of course, exercise, he pestered me repeatedly with applications, penned in the same quaint, professional

style in which his first address to me had been written. So I contented myself for the present with marking him down for future punishment, together with the other indiscreet and impertinent persons who annoyed me with suits of a similar nature; and, according to my usual practice, I sent him back his notes, sometimes unopened.

I had really a great respect for the followers of the eminent professions: I did not look upon them, as some foolish giddy creatures of my sex, as drudges; because I saw others who were able to dispose of their time as they pleased; and certainly much more *unprofitably* than profitably, under the title of men of fashion. When I calmly considered the real merits of the character of the idle 'fashionable,' and of the useful, member of a profession, I could not do otherwise than form a comparison by which the first were considered as drones, and the last as the industrious bees of the vast hive of society.

Yet, so willing am I to be candid towards *all* members of society, the idle as well as employed, that though I considered the first, compa-

ratively, as drones; yet again I reflected, that they, by their levities, foppery, vanity, and vice, afforded a theme for the exercise of the divine's or the moralist's reflections for the general good of society; whereby the mischief of levity and vice is counteracted. So that my philosophy led me to be on good terms with the world in general; and placed me in that amiable and contented tone of mind, that led me to a different conclusion from that which Voltaire and his sect arrive at, when they ironically say—"that all things are for the best."*

But to revert to the subject of my respect for the followers of professions, that is, to the meritorious followers of them, I did not pretend to despise such of my admirers as were in professions, upon that account. No! but I disliked them because they were unworthy of their professions. I am now speaking of those of the church and of physic. Bolus was a quack—Sanctum was a canting hypocrite and no true Christian. Otherwise, what person can

* *Candide*.

be looked on with greater admiration, than he whose trust is over our immortal, sublime, and divine part? Again, what person is more deserving our gratitude than he whose skill preserves to us our lives;—who protracts our enjoyment of the society of our dearest friends, and the power of being useful to society—not to forget the time, also, in which we may prepare ourselves for another state of existence? Therefore, the reasons for my dislike of all my professional lovers, was not any vain, trivial gust of affectation, but existed in those true, sacred, and conscientious causes alone, which I have assigned.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A ROD IN PICKLE FOR AMOROUS IMPERTINENTS.

REALLY, when I contemplated the swains of all professions that assailed me with their adoration, I could not but fancy myself as engaged in the farce of "Love, Law, and Physic."

Mr. Quibble was, I think, rather too devoted to myself to have followed the example of Count Rodolpho Bolusani, by whom my cousin had been beset through the mischievous machinations of Lady Kate and myself. However, if we had cherished any farther intentions of this description, they would have been cut short; as my cousin, not long after her exposure in the affair of the 'Count,' took once again to her good graces, and, moreover, to her nup-

tial couch, (in spite of his perfidiousness towards her, in respect to his love for me, and his subsequent discipline from the said 'Count,')—the gallant Captain Crone, in a few years to be promoted to the additional dignities of Major and Lieutenant-Colonel.

On the event of this important step on the part of my cousin, the dragoon Captain* made haste to make up for lost time, by following his regiment; with the prospect of a provision, by getting killed in service, out of the way. As to my own lovers, they were so everlastingly tiring me by repeated whimperings, that I was obliged to devise some plan by which to be relieved of their farther annoyance. Those who were on the spot, intruded on me with their presence: those who were not, pestered me with epistles. In the punishment of these, I intended including the man of law, 'Counsellor' Quibble, Wrench, and Sanctum, who had lately obtained a piece of preferment, and assumed a 'shovel hat;' and others, whose want of any peculiar character consigns them to oblivion.

* See above, p. 27.—Ed.

What expedient to adopt, to punish, and render them ridiculous, was matter of difficulty. Their devotion for me ran so high, that I was confident whatever penance I might enjoin, they would submit to, and moreover feel flattered at undergoing it. What man, I should like to know, can be a true lover, who will not submit to be made a fool of by his mistress? What lover, I ask again, can be a true one, who can ever be sensible that he is being fooled, to please his mistress? This total blindness as to every discomfiture he goes through, is the best test of his love for her. My gentle spirit led me, so far from enjoining any penance, to propose what really was very agreeable—a little salutary and innocent locomotion, and nothing more.

To promote this desirable object, I wrote to each of my admirers, purporting to be so completely worn out by his solicitations, that I felt myself induced to treat his suit with more seriousness than I had hitherto regarded it. At the same time I regretted that, however conciliatory my feelings towards him might be, I was

unable at that moment to remain upon the spot to encourage his suit, being unfortunately under an engagement to pay a visit to some friends in the country; but that still was I willing to hold out hopes to him of seeing me even there; and had, therefore, for his accommodation, fixed on such and such a place of rendezvous, on such and such a particular day, and at a time appointed. Each was enjoined to carry on matters with secrecy, and on no account to infringe on the strictest punctuality.

A communication of this sort having been severally dispatched to each amatory individual; my next step was, to obtain the assistance of some friend in carrying my design into full execution; the bounds of which, I did not by any means intend limiting to the spot at which I had hitherto fixed it. I pitched upon the person that had treated me so barbarously—young Lord Frippington—as a man of enterprise, and well calculated for the furtherance of my project. I wrote to him explaining its object, and begging that, if he hoped I should ever forget the unhandsome treatment to which he had

subjected me, he would now give me his assistance in punishing some impertinent persons who had wearied me by their addresses, to an extent that demanded forcible measures to put a stop to them.

He called on me at this summons, and after a long scene, in which we became as good friends as if we had never received cause for being dissatisfied with each other, it was agreed, that he should severally meet these loving boobies, at the place and time of appointment ; and mention “ that he had been dispatched from me on purpose to direct them where to find me ; since I had been unavoidably obliged to move sooner than I expected, from the neighbourhood of the place of rencontre ; and, that he had been also farther charged, to desire an instant compliance with my request.” I afterwards learned from Lord F. that this commission was not executed by himself, but a trusty valet of his, in whose hands, he informed me, the execution of my joke was just as safe as in his own. I did not doubt this at all, since this valet was one of the same knaves that aided their master in

his nefarious abduction of myself, at the outskirts of the New Forest.

This Scapin performed his commission to admiration. Each wiseacre was gravely met by him, and as gravely apologised to, for my absence—each was seriously instructed “how much pain it had cost me, to be obliged to be untrue to my appointment—that my departure from the scene of appointment had been instantly demanded, that my regrets were unfeigned, and my request most anxious, that no time might be lost in following me on my track.”

So, whilst my admirers were being sent on a wildgoose-chase after me, I, the Helen that had excited all this enthusiasm, sat quietly at home enjoying the report of Lord F.’s valet—that the original appointment with them, and my subsequent mission to them, had both succeeded to a miracle. One and all, had taken wing on the respective flights on which they had been sent; and though the blindness of passion has urged lovers to wilder acts of devotion than may be witnessed in the present instance

of my admirers, yet for the present moment, I felt satisfied with the amusement they had afforded me.

Really, I think that the ardour of Bolus, Sanctum, Wrench, and Quibble, would have carried them to any lengths; they would even have awakened the jealousy of those pinks of chivalry, Amadis de Gaul, Sir Launcelot, or the Seven Champions, that were whilom the boast of Christendom. This piece of service having been rendered me through Lord Frippington's means, I thought it not improbable that by way of recompense he would commence a renewal of his suit; but was agreeably surprised, on his calling to see me one morning, by hearing from himself the intelligence,—that in consequence of his having despaired of obtaining myself, he had addressed his suit to the wealthy and lovely Miss , and that their marriage was to take place almost immediately.

I sincerely rejoiced with him on his then prospect of happiness, no less so than I now rejoice in contemplating the realization of it. At the time I now write, Lord F. is a fine hand-

some, elderly person, happy in the family of which I have above spoken. Once or twice since her marriage, have I amused Lady Frippington with a recital of her husband's barbarity to me; and I have opened the casement to step again upon the balcony from which I was driven to implore the assistance of the multitude. I have now been long a friend of the family, and I hope, beloved by them. If some little singularities of my late years have rendered me an object of amusement to them, I am sure I do not feel angry at it, nor grudge them their merriment in the least.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OLD MAID'S RETROSPECTS ARE BROUGHT
TO A CLOSE.

THE nuptials of Lord Frippington were scarcely concluded, before my lovers were on their flight back from the wild-goose-chase they had been pursuing ; conscious, at length, what fools they were ; and cackling, poor geese ! vehemently against me, for treating them, as old plays say, “ so scurvily.” I answered merely by an observation, that it was their own fault, and served them right for their audacious and absurd pertinacity : besides, that the disappointment of lovers was a very ordinary occurrence. In order, however, that I might be in future placed beyond the possibility of all farther inconvenience from

them, I appointed them a rendezvous simultaneously, but unknown to each other; and managed that they should get a sound beating, not only from each other, but from some stout and trusty persons provided by myself for that salutary purpose, with proper instructions, and proper—cudgels. Although I am aware that I am not original in this expedient of getting rid of pertinacious lovers by a practical joke, yet I considered that none other was so appropriate, in the instance of lovers of so little distinction as those of whom I am now particularly speaking. Besides, I was determined to amuse myself fully at their expense, as it was the last occasion, perhaps, on which I should think it worth while to make any further burlesque of them.

With respect to Bolus, Sanctum, Wrench, and Quibble, in particular, I appointed them to meet me at my own house. They were of course not a little surprised on finding each other present on the same commission. I let them stay in the room thundering in high words between each other, which ended in a general mauling. Bolus, being the least powerful, was

pommelled by Quibble; and Quibble got well beaten by Wrench; who hopped about the room to evade the blows aimed at him by Sanctum, who, knowing the captain as an old rival, was willing to make him smart once again. But Wrench roaring out to the rest, to assist him against "the parson," Sanctum was beset on all sides, and was floundering and plunging about like a wounded whale. The scuffle was tremendous, when, in the middle of the uproar, three tall fellows, each a match for Sanctum, stalked into the room, and demanded "what business the combatants had there, and how they dared pretend to aspire to my hand, or even to find favour in my countenance?" ordering them at the same time, on pain of an instant drubbing, to leave the house, and no longer think of annoying me by their impertinent addresses. At this they pretended to take additional offence, and clamoured more obstreperously than before; when all argumentation was cut short, by the "tall men" rushing forward, and laying on them right and left a most severe disciplining of cudgels. About the conclusion of the scene, I and Lady

Kate threw open the folding doors of the back drawing-room, and amused ourselves unrestrainedly with the drama exhibited before us, which ended in the same "tall men" (who were no other than our own footmen in disguise) expelling the rivals from the house in woeful pickle, as well from their own mauling as the cudgelling they had subsequently received. I had reason to trust that this most convincing lesson, on the principle of the "baculine argument," would be crowned with the desired effect of bringing all my Leanders to their senses; but for fear they might forget themselves again, when their bruises were healed, and recommence their impertinences, I took the precaution of having a memorial of their absurdities, and its punishment, concisely drawn up, and inserted in the public journals. Their names were duly exposed, as well as their vocations, so that there was no fear of their being suffered to forget their rashness and folly, or the punishment which their conduct had entailed on itself. I dare say, of the two lessons with which I treated these, my unhappy admirers, they relished the last even

worse than they did the drubbing. Here, for the present, let all mention of them be suspended.

It was about this period that I took under my protection the poor little orphan, Mary Hervey, whose history, as far as it goes, has already been disposed of, under the name of Eugénie. The mention of her leads me to say a word about the negro urchin, Mungo; although he did not come under my roof till some time after that of which I am now speaking. I have sometimes amused myself with thinking of Mungo's *parentage*. My old brother once went to the Colonies, in some official capacity or other,—I will not enter into particulars—I may be mistaken when I say that I *fancy* a handsome, tawny-complexioned damsel, a Creole, accompanied him on his return. I have had my suspicions, but will sift the subject no farther—I have no wish to be libellous. It was at *his* recommendation Mungo came under my roof;—but I have done with the cub now, and therefore shall let all farther notice of him sleep.

But to return to the season of Mrs. Crone's, and also of Lord Frippington's nuptials, it must unhappily be obscured, after the fashion of diurnals, by the accompaniment of one or two deaths. I received intelligence of the death of my eldest sister; and my second sister died abroad not many years subsequently. Just a week after Lord Frippington's marriage, my good old housekeeper, Margaret, followed the path of her fellow domestic, Cuthbert.

Years fled amain, and were not adding either to the lustre of my beauty or the number of my admirers: the loss of the last I could well spare, though I began to be rather fidgety about the first, for fear they should fade before the return of Albert, whenever that might be,—and something boded it was now not far removed. In spite of the lapse of time, my good looks, juvenility of appearance, and lightness of figure, maintained their ground surprisingly; and I hoped still that my lover might find on his return that my attractions were not altogether lost. I used to suggest this to Lady Kate; but she, satirical creature! would

only smile and suggest to me my exhibition of that tone of mock-sentimentality, which, I must suppose, now began to characterize my romantic reveries. She might be right, perhaps; I cannot exactly say: if I am again betrayed into the adoption of this tone in touching upon subjects of a tender nature, affecting this crisis of my life, I cannot help it. I shall certainly not suppress any expression of tenderness, of which I may be sensible. And although I have now done with youthful reminiscences, I shall still write as I feel; yes, though I again proceed to speak of myself in the character of an "Old Maid!"—though I may again unworthily appear to exhibit myself in the light of burlesque!

The events which I am about to record, will be taken notice of in that order of time at which they take place; as before the commencement of the retrospective portion of my history.

CHAPTER XX.

MYSTERY AND SENTIMENTALITY.

It was on the dawn of my nine-and-fortieth summer that I made a solitary excursion to the Lakes, taking up my residence for some days in a cottage on the borders of Borrodale.

Delightful was it to me to wander, when the heat of the day was past, amongst those sublime and sterile cliffs, and listen to the tinkling of the sheep-bell at dusk, as the flocks browsed on the short turf at their feet.

I had been standing for some time gazing on the cliffs, wrapped in a pleasing reverie, when I suddenly started, on finding that a somewhat fearful-looking person was approaching near the spot on which I stood. I hastened onwards towards my cottage, from which I was

not very far distant, and hoped to arrive at it before I could be overtaken.

The stranger seemed wrapped in meditation, and his hurried step indicated that the subject of his meditation could not be other than that of a painful nature. On his nearer approach he gave me reason to doubt whether he was in his right mind or not; for he would at one instant stride forward rapidly, and then slacken his pace,—pause suddenly, mutter something to himself, and then hasten forward again.

As I found that I should not be able to reach my cottage before he came up to me, I was resolved to let him pass, and retreated behind a prominence in the cliff that overhung the ridge of rock on which the stranger and myself were walking.

Whether he perceived me secreting myself, I know not; but either designedly, or by chance, he sat himself down on a slab of stone close by the side of the rock behind which I stood, and afforded me a good side view of his face and person. His figure was thin and tall, and he wore, what appeared to me to be a rich

Indian mantle, thrown negligently across his shoulders. His face was long, and his complexion swarthy; long, dark mustachios shaded his upper lip, and a beard flowed over his breast. Not being able to obtain a full view of his face, I regretted being unable to tell what his features were; the outline of his face put me much in mind of the profile of one whose every lineament was still fresh in my mind's eye.

He sat silent for some moments, with his eyes bent upon the ground, when suddenly he roused himself from his reverie, and drawing a deep sigh, he uttered aloud the subject of his ponderings; but so incoherent and disconnected was all that fell from him, that I was unable to comprehend the purport of his soliloquy. It was seldom, indeed, that I could catch a complete sentence, in so strange and sudden a manner did he drop his voice:—

“ Sad—dreadful—lost not *one* left of all that precious gone all that was so dear to me once! the most wretched on the whole face of the earth myself driven by this cruel—loneliness—regret desolation.

Not remembered by one Change to me so grievous ! Yes change Such is the lottery of life—my heart was all in—all my life was for—that—hope that *one* lost ay, lost, never to be recovered.”

The unhappy stranger paused for a few moments, and then resumed in the same incoherent strain :—

“ I had at least hoped to have found one happy hour Fortune did she not once favour me but feelings are changed now changed with circumstances What was it to which I had ever looked in all my toil as the reward all my prospects ? But every thing is shut out every prospect now I had hoped—but—my hopes—frustrated ! at an end ! ”

The stranger’s voice sunk so low here, that I could not glean any articulate word from him. He again spoke, and in a rather louder tone ; “ I had hoped through every vicissitude, at length to have been repaid for my constant saved all this pain—bitter blow—but all . . . lost no more to—I had dreamt one day to have

repaid them with a better reward but, no, no!—I have seen thousands embarked in the same struggle as myself but never did I see a more sanguine ardour, more heartfelt anxiety many have been wrecked as well as myself would my lot were oh, change! change! better never to have shown so tantalized undone!”

The stranger rose from his seat, with another deep-drawn sigh, and strolled slowly along the ridge: he then stopped to gaze upon the thin clouds that were chasing each other before the face of the moon, still wrapped in his meditations, when starting suddenly, he turned abruptly away, as if something called him back from his wanderings. I looked after him till his form was lost in the shadows of the over-arching cliffs.

“Is this insanity,” I said to myself? “Am I able to conjecture the meaning of those incoherent musings? does my mind rightly divine their cause? Can it be himself returned at last? Can it be my —?”

I hurried from my retreat towards my cot-

tage, indulging in such conjectures as the stranger's appearance and language gave rise to.

Not a moment's slumber was I conscious of that night, so great was the excitation of my mind: the stranger's figure haunted me—his air of interest and melancholy, as I now considered it, was still present to my imagination—his words still dwelt upon my ear, and my spirit caught the melancholy contagion which they had breathed.

While yet the sun was rising, while yet the grey mists of early day were streaked with his first purple rays—I wandered out upon the ridge. My brain was throbbing for want of repose, and I was glad to enjoy the cool breeze of the morning. I looked wistfully about for the object, the thought of which had prevented my repose; thinking it possible that he might choose the same early period for his melancholy roamings. I fancied I saw his mysterious form on the path, as on the preceding evening,—now calmly and anxiously gazing upon the heavens—now rapidly hurrying onward—but no! it was not there. At noon I came again, hoping to

learn something more of the stranger's mysterious history, but I was disappointed. Again and again did I renew my wanderings, but never once was he visible.

Yet although his form was no longer presented to my eye, every word that had fallen from his lips still vibrated in my ear. "It must be *he*," I said to myself, "or why should he say not *one* left of all that precious" He must allude to my family, most of whom, such as he can remember, are dead and gone. Or why should he complain of loneliness, regret, and desolation? Why should he lay such stress upon the *change* in every thing around him? This seemed to goad him more than anything else of which he complained—yes—change in the affections of that object whom he had hoped to find faithful to him on his return—is evidently the meaning of his distress.—"And canst thou, then, believe thy Clorinda has forgotten thee? thou dearest of persons!"

I burst into tears, unable to contain myself, so great was the *sentimentality* that overwhelmed me. I continued, through my sobs—"Why

shouldst thou talk of being ‘tantalized’—if thou didst not believe that thy Clorinda had bestowed her love upon some other than thyself, after thy long years of promised fidelity?—if thou didst not think, that when thou hadst returned to seek the reward of thy constancy, thou hadst found it severed from thee? If insanity has possession of thy mind, it must be *this* cruel delusion that has afflicted thee with it! . . . Oh! would thy form were again near me, that I might fly to thee, and undeceive thy cruel and mistaken impressions. Methought I heard, too, as thy noble form glided from my vision, a name escape thy lips, the dearest that can salute my ears. Albert Conroy! Albert Conroy! if it be *thy* form that I have seen, if it be *thy* voice that I have heard, oh, would thou wert once again before me, that I might restore thee to love, and to a sense of the unviolated sanctity of our youth’s mutual pledge!”

I looked about me, as though the invocation might, perhaps, bring the mysterious figure before me. I fancied I saw it at a distance,

gliding along the brow of the cliff: I hurried forward towards it—I called aloud upon it it vanished from me. Was it but a shadow?—I cast my eyes on the track behind me—again I fancied I saw that mysterious vision. I was unable to suppress a shriek: the silence that ensued, as its echoes died upon the cliff, terrified me—still was I dodged by the mysterious shadow. My brain whirled round: with difficulty I tottered to the door of my cottage, and had no sooner set foot within its threshold, than I sunk exhausted on the floor.

CHAPTER XXI.

QUITE THE CLIMAX OF ROMANCE.—MRS. RADCLIFFE CUT OUT ALL TO NOTHING.

THERE are few particulars that speak the present advancement of mind, and of taste, more, than the revolution that has taken place in the character of our works of amusement and fiction, of late years. It was no very great length of time ago, when the bare idea of a romantic feature of country would have inspired a description much in the following strain :—

“ The last long shadows of the cliffs of Helvellyn were stretching headlong over its gigantic base, and the murmurings of the precipitous waterfalls that leaped in fearful cascades from its pinnacled summit, were almost the only sounds that broke upon the ear, save the dis-

tant echo of the lowing herds, or the bleating of flocks. The transient cottager's whistle now and then proclaimed that the stir of life had not totally abandoned the scene ; and while the moon was beginning to disclose her pale orb in the heavens, and to bid her silvery light succeed the ensanguined effulgence of the crimson-sheeted resplendence of day—the vehicle which bore myself on its lonely way, moved slowly beneath the overarching terrors of rocky sublimity.”

Being of a romantic turn myself, I will pursue this strain a very little farther ; though I will confess, that my object in doing so, is to amuse my reader by and by, with opposing an anticlimax to it, in order to set it off in the strongest light of burlesque.

“ Romance ! thou grand, thou appalling delight of the ecstatic soul ! Clorinda Mirabelle hails thee as the sympathetic spirit of her, not unjoyously, though painfully brooding bosom ! She speaks the language of thy inspiration, as the only adequate organ by which to express her passionately irritated sensibilities !

“ Spirit of Radcliffe, arise ! I invoke thee from the caverns of the ilex-clad Apennines, and the mysterious mazes of solitary forests ! Disclose thy shadowy form beneath the moon’s pallid gleam, which is now throwing a silvery mantle *adown* the dusky, beetling-cragged Helvellyn !

“ Slow moves the vehicle onward. Sweetly, appallingly delightful, are the agitating fancies of this lonely hour ! . . . Helvellyn, are thy heights passed ? Winander-Mere ! is it thy sinuous current which streams beneath the moon-beam, present before my enraptured vision ? Spirit of Radcliffe ! hast thou followed me, hovering propitiously near, from the craggy-topped mountain height, to the liquid undulations of the lake’s glassy surface ?

“ Howl, ye Apennine wolves ! bay ye the moon in your distant caverns ! Topple, ye crags ! Nod, ye pines ! Blasted oaks, creak ye in the midnight wind ! Arise, ye pallid ghosts, at the necromancer’s bidding, in the black wolf-glens of thy forests, unfathomable Hartz !”

“ Dank is the atmosphere of thy morasses, O Italia! Blue are the lightnings that flash over the summit of Andes! Waters of Arno, loveliest is your tide! Loud, Niagara, thy roaring cataracts,—and white their spray! but Clorinda Mirabelle asks not the aid of all your presiding spirits, to enable her to give scope to the wild ecstasies of romantic delight; for the spirit of Radcliffe is present at her bidding, mid the towering hills and embosomed lakes of Westmoreland, as powerfully as in the far romantic wilds of Abruzzo, or the deep ravines of the bandit-thronged Calabria!—The wastes where Babylon once stood are desolate; and mournful are the haunts where memory whispers of Udolpho! Conscious of guilt are the moon-beams as they silently flit across the gothic vistas of yon mouldering turret of Freschidoni—sighing ghosts render solitude and night more dreadful! Yet ye all are nought to me, ye gloomy visions of terror! Murky figures of blood-chilling romance, your mystery is not so interesting to me, as that of *his* haughty presence..... I call not on

your names, while Borrodale awakens the form of the stranger. It is Albert Conroy I called for, there ! and the figure of Albert Conroy stalks mysteriously before my rapture-thrilling gaze, along the nodding prominences of Helvellyn, and the deep-embowered waters of Winander-Mere !”

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Two days of journeying had passed ; my thoughts wandering on the dream to which I have endeavoured, though faintly, to give expression. It was night when my carriage stopped before the gate of the “ George and Dragon,” in the respectable, provincial city of ——. Being excessively hungry, I instantly discussed an adequate repast of boiled chicken and poached eggs, accompanied by a little white-wine negus. The wine being rather strong, or very likely adulterated, its fumes occasioned a drowsiness ; and sleep was beginning to weigh down my lids, when my ear was suddenly saluted by the following sounds. “ Can nothing then avail to regain that which has been lost ? Will things never again be what they once were ? . . . must

hope for *ever* yield must at once all credit and confidence . . . sink Will it be best to remove things so discouraging here . . . But whither go? . . . or what the benefit . . . the mischief still remains: the evil exists. What good . . . has? . . . oh, change! oh, change! . . . undone. It is impossible! . . never can be restored! must sink . . . foul, foul, cruel—Expectations blighted undone! ”

At once I knew, that the words I now overheard, proceeded from the mysterious stranger. I listened again, and anxiously lent my ear for some time to catch any syllable that might arise . . . but nothing farther heard I—all was silent in the adjoining room. Shortly afterwards, I was made sensible of a loud scuffling of waiters in the passage, and knew by the rattling of wheels at the entrance gate, that somebody had just taken leave of the inn.

I started up with an involuntary exclamation of disappointment . . . “He is lost, then!—again lost, and snatched from me the moment that I might have discovered myself, and regained

him ! O cruel, cruel disappointment ! Why sat I listening so long until these sounds should again break forth ? Why did I not *instantly* rush into the presence of him who uttered them, and at once declare myself ? My Albert, it must be thyself, and no other, that can lament this ‘change,’ so piteously, of all thou hadst expected, and cherished here at home ! Alas ! that change of which thou complainest, is the mistaken idea of a change in *my* affections. Oh ! cruel delusion, I would I could have dispelled it ! Again, methought I heard thee mention some name in the exclamations of thy despair, and that name sounded to my ears, like none other than that of Albert Conroy !” I opened the door of the room in which the stranger had been, but found no one there. A half-smoked tobacco-pipe lay upon the table : the bill, (amounting to two and three-pence,) which had been twisted up to light it, was by its side : a piece of broken biscuit was thrown negligently on the mantelpiece : a small portion of rum and water still exhaled its disagreeable effluvia from a tumbler—a halfpenny wrapped

up in 'whity-brown' paper, had been left behind—thereby testifying the abstraction of mind of him who had been lately in the room, and could so leave it. Alas! no longer was *he* there!

The rattling of wheels had too truly announced to me his departure—disconsolate, disappointed, distracted, heavy in heart, and heavy also from the fume of the negus, and the repast I had recruited myself withal, I rung for my attendant, and was shown up to my bed-room, glad to seek repose in mind and body. I slept very soundly till a late hour the next morning.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROMANCE IS WOUND UP TO A MOST PERPLEXING CRISIS, AT WHICH IT ENDS.

IT now occurred to me for the first time, as I was journeying on the next morning towards London, that the mysterious stranger had been haunting *me*—that he had been watching over my movements, to observe if I betrayed any signs of that infidelity towards him, which I had been induced to suspect was the cause of his unhappiness. For that this mysterious stranger and my lover, Albert Conroy, were one and the same person, I could scarcely doubt. I therefore derived some consolation from the idea, that if it were true that he had been haunting my footsteps, my being so entirely by myself, would awaken a favourable idea in his mind,

that I had not given myself away to any person during his absence. Still every thing was doubt, hesitation, and uncertainty.

It was, in the first place, uncertain, whether this mysterious man were really Albert Conroy, or not ; yet his speech accorded with that of a lover whose expectations in the object of his affections had been cruelly disappointed,—which was the mistake under which I conceived him to labour. It was also an uncertainty whether he haunted me or not ; yet could it be mere chance that brought us near each other twice, and that led him to pursue the same road as myself ? Surely these were strong appearances of *design*. Besides, when I contemplated the tall figure of the man, his Indian mantle, and swarthy complexion, I could scarcely doubt that the form I saw was that of my lover returned at length to his native shores. Painful, then, were the reflections in which I indulged, when they led me to conclude that he was thus backward in revealing himself to me, because, doubtless, he had been informed,—not only, that I had been the object of very general

attraction, but that I might still be in request, if I were not even already possessed, by some person more favoured than his forgotten self. All this cause for jealousy was so natural,—these conjectures were so just and well-founded,—that I was more and more confirmed in the belief that Albert Conroy, my lover, was in the country, anxiously wishing to reclaim me, and that he had been rendered unhappy by the belief that I had forgotten my pledge to him.

The idea that he haunted me, still possessed me: there was not a single carriage that passed me rapidly on the road during my journey, that did not make me fancy Albert was dodging my movements. That he did so during the *whole* route, I had little doubt, since, at the conclusion of my journey, a chariot and four, which I took to be his, wheeled rapidly past me into the very same square, through which I was passing to the street where I resided.

As I turned out of the square into the street, I observed the chariot stop, and a tall person, muffled up in a cloak, alight, very much re-

sembling in figure the mysterious stranger. I was not, however, by any means certain that it was the same. I was inclined to think it was not, as the features hardly seemed to agree with those of the stranger.

Still all was uncertain: it *might* be he, and if so, how near was I to the man who was almost all that was dear to me in the world! I lost no time the next morning in calling upon Lady Frippington, being my next most intimate friend to Lady Kate, (of whom I still heard nothing,) and gave her a full account of all that had passed since I had last been in town, and how much of mystery now hung upon my mind, and excited in me a curiosity which was very painful.

I, of course, expected from her much surprise at my marvellous relation, but she merely smiled a little, and said that no doubt all would in time be cleared up to my satisfaction; whatever the result might be, she hoped that it would be such as I desired, and that I might at length find my fidelity rewarded, in the presence of my lover returned to claim me.

“Meantime,” said she archly, “I can unravel a small portion of the mystery, by informing you that the person you saw get out of the chariot in —— Square, is my Lord D——, as little given to romance or solitary murmurings, as any being in the universe: though silly in many respects, he is, still, a man of influence in *some*.”

“Well!” I replied, a little annoyed at the ice of my mystery being so quickly, yet composedly, broken through, “I did not, indeed, consider it as probable that the person I saw get out of the chariot, was the same as the figure I witnessed in Borrodale; and am glad you have eased my mind of its uncertainty so far.”

“I should not be surprised,” continued Lady Frippington, “if the whole mystery were to be as easily expounded as this part of it: I have no doubt that it will be so soon.”

“Not *quite* so easily, I should think,” I answered, a little pettishly.

“Suppose,” said Lady Frippington, “we go to the Opera together this evening; it will be

something for us to do, and will serve to drive the clouds of these mysteries from your mind."

"I am perfectly willing," I replied, "to go to the Opera; but as to *that*, or any thing else, having the power to dispel from my imagination the subjects which at present haunt it, is out of the question; though I am not by any means without hope that a solution of my doubts will, at no great distance of time, be afforded me."

I left my friend Lady Frippington, telling her that I should be in readiness to go with her when she should call for me. There was not a single tall figure in the Opera-house that I did not take for that of the mysterious stranger. First, a lanky guardsman startled me, then a foreign ambassador; but though these had mustachios, they had not the addition of a beard. I observed a face peeping from behind the scenes, that struck me as bearing some resemblance to that of the swarthy Indian, but it was not he.

In vain did Lady Frippington endeavour to call my attention from the subject of anxiety

to admire the music, criticize the singing, or direct our glasses round the house to discover acquaintances. Nothing but the tall figure moved my eyes—no splendour of decoration, charms of voice, or beauty of dancing, could for a moment efface from my recollection the bearer of the Indian mantle. The best singing was but discord, compared to those mysterious complainings that still vibrated in my ear.

The spectators and the stage were alike forgotten, for the images that were awakened by the recollection of Borrodale.

The faces of my acquaintance, in the different boxes my eye glanced on, were scarcely recognized. Abstracted I sat, and paid little attention to the inquiries of such gentlemen of our acquaintance as came into our box in the course of the evening. They sat down and talked, without any consciousness on my part of what they were saying, and scarcely even of their presence.

In fact, if this mystery that engrossed me, had not shortly been brought to the crisis of a disclosure, I think that I must infallibly have

gone distracted, and pined away through the rest of my life in regrets for the unhappy condition of him whom I conceived to be my lover.

A whole week passed away in most painful suspense and unsatisfactory conjecture: at length my eyes one morning were met, on coming down stairs from my room, by a note which was lying on the table.

My mind being in a high state of agitation, I eagerly seized it: the character in which it was written, put me in mind of that specimen, which I still cherished and kept by me as the youthful effusion of my lover. My eyes glistened with delight, my heart beat high, I tore open the seal, as I sunk nearly overpowered on the couch.

The signature was all I looked for, as the first object—it *was* from *him*! it was from my Albert!—My long-lost lover's name was there! Yes, yes, it was true that he was at last restored to love and his own Clorinda. My surmises had not deceived me in viewing the form of Albert Conroy in that of the mysterious stranger: he had followed my footsteps, and

was at length resolved on declaring himself to me, and demanding of me, if I had kept sacred the pledge which I had once vowed to him.

The ecstasy into which I had been thrown at the sight of this dear chirograph, and especially the still dearer signature, rendered me unable to fix my attention to the note for some little time. I was obliged to seek a momentary relief in tears: on coming a little to myself, I addressed myself to the perusal of the note. But, alas! as I read it, my ecstasy was damped, rather than elated, by finding it written in a less ardent, impassioned, and querulous tone than I should have conceived would have characterized the style of a lover, and one who could utter such interesting complaints as the mysterious stranger in Borrodale. The words of the note were these:—

“ To Mrs.* Mirabelle.”

“ My dear Madam,

“ As I fancy you are one of the few persons

* “ Mrs. ! qu ?” C. M.

living of my acquaintance at the time I left England, I shall come and pay my respects to you as soon as I can find time. At present I write this that you may not be surprised at my calling;

“ Yours truly,

“ ALBERT CONROY.”

“ Coffee-house,
Tower Stairs.”

The precise, matter-of-fact, laconic, cold style, in which this communication was penned, made me doubt my eyes when I looked upon the signature. “ Impossible !” I exclaimed, “ that my lover, the tender, warm-hearted Albert Conroy, could ever write so ascetic and unimpassioned a letter as this ! But stay, let me not be too harsh, too precipitate in judging—may it not rather arise from tenderness and solicitude, that he has written in this unimpassioned and subdued manner ? May it not have been dictated by his apprehension of overpowering me by the adoption of a more impassioned style ? Is it not out of regard for my feelings, that he has rather been willing to throw a damp on

them than to excite them to a dangerous height? Kind, considerate, excellent-hearted, generous lover!" I exclaimed, "forgive the momentary uneasiness of thy adoring and adored Clorinda! I love thee more and more fondly, for this new testimony of thy delicate attention and regard for me. I cherish thee more and more for this most considerate renovation (after so many, many years) of unimpaired fondness, thou generous-hearted man! When wilt thou glad me with the sight of thy"

While I was yet kissing the note, and continuing my encomiastic invocations to my lover, thus tenderly, also, asking myself when he should come,—a rap sounded on my door. It could not be the two-penny postman's, because he had just called, nor could it be any tradesman's, because those persons did not generally call at that time—whose could it be then? I waited all breathless with impatience, and palpitating at heart—the door was opened—I heard some one enter the house—footsteps sounded on the staircase—they drew nearer and nearer—they reached the door of the room in which I

was,—the door opened, and a tall figure entered the room, which was at once presented to my imagination as that of the mysterious stranger. The sound of his name as he was announced, told me that Albert Conroy, my long-lost lover, stood before me ! Oh, heavens ! what a flood of bliss, what glittering dreams of matrimonial happiness and rewarded constancy floated before me ! I was unable to advance to meet him—the effort that I made was too much for me—I uttered a faint, hysterical shriek, and staggering back a few paces, sunk upon the pillow of the couch. But why have I mentioned the word matrimonial ?—why do I anticipate, though my lover stands before me—though he is at last returned to reclaim me ?—I am still interesting in *maiden* innocence,—still tremblingly looking towards the nuptial shrine Yes, I am as yet, still—an “Old-Maid.”

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE OLD MAID IN A COUNTRY VILLAGE.

“ The village gossip, on the wrack to pry,
And gad, and prate, and meddle. Stale old crone !
Grotesque in gait, in visage, style, and gear :
Welcome to none ; the jest, yet dread of all ;
Intruding every where.”

OLD PLAY.

BOOK THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY,—IN WHICH ALL THE MYSTERIES OF ROMANCE ARE SEEN TO VANISH.

THE reader is now called upon to listen to the conclusion of the agitating scene, with which my preceding book terminated.

Well,—on coming to myself again, after the fainting fit—instead of finding Mr. Albert Conroy in a despairing, or at least, anxious attitude,—instead of finding him kneeling before me with a look of earnest and painful inquiry—with one hand clasping my own, and with the other holding his pocket handkerchief up to

his eyes,—the man was sitting as quietly and unconcernedly as possible, reading the newspaper ! Nor was it until I had screamed out no less than three times, “ Mr. Albert ! Mr. Conroy ! ” that he seemed at all aware I had recovered myself. He knew as little about my condition as he cared !

This want of feeling, so little expected as it was, and certainly so little merited, no less disgusted, than it shocked me. And what will it be supposed was the gentleman’s excuse for his unconcern ? “ That his eye had been caught by a paragraph mentioning a great fall in the price of stocks ; and that consols were as low as sixty-five ! ”

I said nothing to this unfeeling and coarse remark—but it was with difficulty I could refrain from expressing, in strong terms, the pain it occasioned my feelings. That any man should attend to the price of stocks, as a subject of interest, in comparison with that of the fainting beauties of an engaging and sensitive female ; and one too, whom he once cherished as the “ girl of his devotion,” is rather too

barbarous to be credited ; but so it was, in the present instance.

Little did I think that *my* Albert could have behaved himself thus on his return to me. But, alas ! was he *my* Albert any longer ? That remains farther to be seen—but, at present, did he show himself so, in the phlegmatic, and I may say vulgar manner, in which he had behaved himself, while I was exhibiting such very tender emotions ? Alas ! man is but an inconstant, fickle being, compared with our sex ! *We* go through fire and water to serve *him* : we follow *him* through all perils : we suffer with him under all distresses, and support them for his sake—we alone remain faithful through long years of separation ! *He*, indeed, can utter professions louder and more vehement, perhaps, than any that proceed from our lips : but he utters professions, not as we do—from the heart, but merely verbal. Volleys of oaths, truly,—asseverations of fidelity and vows, does he pour forth on his first being enamoured,—but these are all too soon blotted out from his heart, and effaced from his memory ! Some

other fair, smiles to charm him—he is drawn away, and the passion he a moment ago felt, is no sooner avowed, than it is supplanted by a new one,—itself, also, to fade away, perhaps equally soon.

Again, let me ask whether this person who now sat before me, was the same whose noble-looking, romantic figure in youth still presented itself to my mind's eye? Not he! he was a tall, lanky-legged, shrivelled fellow, with a disagreeable, penurious countenance; hard-featured and yellow-complexioned: his dress shabby, his voice grating and harsh, his manner blunt, precise, and matter-of-fact; and his whole appearance what is called “business-like,” and that of a stock-jobber.

The first words that this much-altered man uttered to me, on laying down the newspaper on the table, were, “Well, Mrs. Mirabelle, I hope you're better than you were a moment ago?”—(*Mrs. Mirabelle! mark that!*)

“I thank you, Sir,” I said, (tossing my head up with an air of undissembled dissatisfaction, and with difficulty repressing the tears that rage

and grief would have readily forced into my eyes) “I *am* better!”

“Well, Ma’am,” he continued,—(never *once* did he address me by the soothing appellation of “my love,” or “my dear!”)—“you ’re so altered since I saw you last, I should not have known you again, had I not seen you here in your own house.” Never once did he observe he was *glad* to see me. I thought, perhaps, that by awakening the reminiscences of youth, his disagreeable, harsh tone might be softened.

“Do you remember,” I said, in an endearing, tremulous tone, “do you remember the pleasurable rambles that we used to enjoy in each other’s society—over our native hills—when youth smiled upon us both?”

“Ay, ay,” interrupted he, “that was when you and I were young—things are altered now though—are they not?”

“How *can* you talk so unfeelingly of those sweet days of youth and happiness—(*heigh oh!*) when we breathed those mutual vows!”

“Oh, Lord! Mrs. Mirabelle, don’t talk of mutual vows, *now!* It is a little too much to

be expected to remember *them*, after a matter of I don't know how many years! God bless you! It might have been all very well at one time to vow and protest, and rave about love, and all such nonsense as that—but things are changed now."

"Such nonsense as that, say you!" I cried with astonishment; "call *you* then, 'love,' nonsense? I thought I heard *you*—Mr. Albert Conroy, and nobody else but you, moaning forth your complaints but a short time ago, upon the subject of this same 'nonsense,' as you call it."

"*I* moaning, bless you! Where was *I* moaning, I should like to know?"

"Did I not see you, some time ago, on the ridge in Borrodale, wandering by yourself, and uttering ——"

"*I* in Borrodale, my good Mrs. Mirabelle! mercy on you! I have been in a lodging in Change Alley, for the last half-year, in order that I might be near the India House and the Exchange. I have been there ever since I landed at Deal, which is now above six months ago."

“Change Alley!” I exclaimed; “gracious goodness! Then you are *not* the mysterious stranger, the tall solitary wanderer, that I witnessed brooding over the sorrows of his bosom, although the period of your return tallies with that of the scene I witnessed.”

“Oh! I see what nonsense you are thinking of—it is, no doubt, about the man concerning whom the chancery lawyers have been petitioning the court for a commission of lunacy. His friends live at Cockermouth, and he had a cottage in Borrodale: his name is Jenkyns, and he was, as I understand, a noted alligator on change:—(“A noted alligator on change, and his name Jenkyns!” I exclaimed aside)—That must be the man you are thinking about, be assured: he has been crazed now for a year or more, and has been sent to his friends in that part of the country, some time past, to be taken care of. He is always wandering about in that strange way. How could you suppose I should ever make such a fool of myself?”

“No, Sir!” I replied indignantly, colouring up to the eyes; “the person I saw could not

have been any ‘alligator on change,’ nor do I believe his name was Jenkyns. He talked not of his losses, nor the stocks, nor of any thing relative to such sordid topics;—love, Sir; ardent and despairing passion alone dictated his solitary musings.”

“Lord! my good Mrs. Mirabelle,” replied the barbarian giggling, “it was your imagination that conjured up this poor *rooked** sinner into a despairing lover: take my word for it, this is the case.”

“What! then the interesting, romantic figure I used to see, was no other, was it, than the person of an unlucky stock-jobber?”

“Lord, no!” said he, repeating the offensive giggle; “I can tell you all about the man, since you named the place where you saw him.”

“What, then!” I retorted incredulously, “it was a stock-jobber, was it, that I saw in a rich *Indian* mantle?”

“God bless you! that was an old plaid cloak,

* A specimen of the slang, current amongst gamesters on Change, (and other gamesters as well,) signifying ‘ruined.’ It is a very old word in our language.

bought second-hand of a brother Jew, in Monmouth-street."

"A brother Jew, Sir! I will not believe that the figure I saw was that of a Jew, or of a broker."

"You may believe just as you please: the man you saw was no other than Abraham Jenkins, the *rooked* Jew broker—why, you might have found out he was a Jew by his beard."

I now recollected that a prominent feature about the mysterious stranger had been a beard. I blushed up to the eyes, but still could not give up the point. I continued, bristling up indignantly, "I know not then, what his figure or his dress might have been, but his language was very different from that of a stockbroker: he complained of his blighted expectations, which certainly alluded to the subject of love only; and he reiterated the word 'change!' evidently alluding to the supposed change in the affections of some person he valued."

"For God's sake, Mrs. Mirabelle, say no more about this! I tell you that this man has been raving for some time in this way about his

losses on Change, and the frustration of his gambling stock-jobbing schemes; that was what he meant by talking of 'disappointed expectations,' and by repetitions of the word 'Change.' —Love! Heaven help you, the man was never in love in all his life!"

"You are bantering, Sir: I am confident it could be no other than *yourself*; and that it was *me* of whom you were speaking. Yes, you have got rid of your beard, I doubt not, to appear not to be the same person that haunted me, and to try to deceive me! Dare you deny it? when I heard you cry out your own name distinctly, 'Albert Conroy?'"

"Pooh! pooh! fiddlestick's end! the name you heard was Abraham Jenkyns, and no other! How could you think I could be such a fool as to think about any woman so much, as to tramp over the country raving about her, and then to cut off my beard, (if I had one,) in order to deceive her? Believe me, I have no identity with Abraham Jenkyns; and as for you, it was only the other day that I thought about you, having been thinking over what old acquaintance I had alive, on my return home."

“ I cannot give up the point, Sir, even *yet*,” I rejoined, in a shrill and angry tone ; “ I have farther proof that the stranger could not be any person so indifferent to me as you would wish to represent ;—he followed me on the road—actually followed me !—there, Sir !”

“ Followed *you* ! (*he, he, he,*)—how do you know he followed *you*, even if it were indeed the same strange person you saw before ? No doubt, the poor lunatic was being conveyed back to town, in order to be examined as to the state of his mind, by the committee appointed to take care of him and his affairs.”

“ Shameful, preposterous want of feeling,” I said to myself, but did not just at present reprobate him for it as I should have wished, in order to see farther, if he had yet any spark of regard left for me. I therefore changed the subject, and continued :—“ Well, Mr. Conroy, it appears then, that I was mistaken in my idea of having seen you ; but I should like to be allowed to ask you concerning an expression that fell from you when I mentioned our early attachment just now ; which was, that ‘ things were changed *now*.’ I beg to know with what intent

you said so, and what changes they may be to which you alluded. You do not surely find me *much* altered?" I added, casting my eyes on the looking-glass.

"Altered!" he snorted out, in another fit of giggling, "why, do you suppose that you can be the same at forty-nine and past, that you were at fifteen? Hah! hah! hah! that is good, however!"

I was so enraged at this last insult, that it was impossible for me to restrain giving vent to my rage and vexation in a flood of tears, as copious as my misplaced joy had elicited on the first appearance of this insulting man; when what was it, the monster uttered? "O good God!" exclaimed he to himself, but loud enough for me to hear, "another fit of blubbering!" and at the same time he took up his hat and stick, and hoping that the next time he called on me, I should be better, he walked off, saying that, "at present, he had business on Change, and so wished me good morning."

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The shock I had sustained from this barbarous treatment, was so violent that I did not re-

cover from it for some days. I remained confined to my house, and did not think of seeing any one ; for as to Lady Kate, she was still out of the way.

So then, all the mystery in which of late I had been so entranced, has, it seems, turned out a mere shadow—a delusion ! The language which I thought breathed of change of affection and of feelings of constancy, related to the vulgar subject of stock-jobbing losses on the Change, in view of Change-alley ! The name which my imagination taught my ears to listen to as that of Albert Conroy, was the odious cognomen of Abraham Jenkyns ! The fine swarthy countenance of the stranger was the sallow gypsy complexion of a cadaverous and unlucky Jew cockney ! The exalted distraction of love was metamorphosed into sordid dyspepsy, or disorderly craziness that called for a straight waistcoat. And how had I been deluded, too, not less by the hard-hearted Albert Conroy himself, with respect to the affection which I had fancied he cherished for me ; than by the mistake of my imagination rela-

tive to the scene at Borrodale! The barbarous behaviour of the man not only betrayed the absence of all affection, but even showed no compunction whatever, when he saw me so much hurt at his indifference. He neither came to make any inquiries after me, subsequently to the scene which had passed between us, or to offer any apology for his conduct. I waited and waited in expectation of his calling on me to inquire after my health, and to express his solicitude for the uneasiness which his conduct had occasioned me. No such a thing! no message even of inquiry was sent by him; much less did he call himself.

Still I waited—and still did I wait in vain. At length my impatience knew no bounds, and, actuated by every feeling of rage and disappointment, I addressed to him the following letter.

“FALSE! fickle! inhuman man! insulting monster! Is *this* the manner in which you repay the constancy and affection of so many long years? Cruel, insensate deceiver! Barbarous, barbarous cajoler!—At least feel *some* compunction,

when you reflect that I have reserved myself in a state of singleness, sacred for *your* possession, whenever you should return to claim me. Yes, —reserved myself, I say, amidst thousands and thousands of temptations to marry—temptations the most flattering, far more so than any which *you* can hold out to me:—I say I have rejected them all in obedience to the memory of that pledge which none but the most unfeeling and dishonourable of men could ever have forgotten. At least you might have *sooner* given me some intimation of the insincerity of your early professions! But to keep me thus, as you have done, in a long and harassing state of suspense—and then deceive me. O shameful, cruel, unheard-of barbarism! Any soul possessed of a spark of generosity or nobleness of feeling, would have scorned such conduct: it would have found a noble pleasure in making compensation for that patience and constancy, which so amply deserved the reward to which they looked. Reward, do I say? Heavens! what reward is the person of an ugly, old, weather-stained nabob? Yes,

nabob—you are nothing more than an old sordid Indian! Yet *such* is the person that dares to disregard my charms!Why, you unhandsome stockjobber you! are *you* the sort of person who ought to feel thus indifferent to my charms, because they are not still what they were at sixteen? Are you, pray, the same yourself as you were at that age? Am I not, then, good enough for you? Is it not well for you, on your return, to feel that there is one human being that has a regard for you? Can you expect to buy the love of *youth*? Are you not mad if you do? Disagreeable nabob! Where, indeed, can you expect to find any love for yourself, except in the breast that was devoted to you in youth? But supposing that I was the most emaciate beldam, the most invetérate hag, the veriest ronion in all this world,—a noble soul would have found glory in making me amends for my constancy—my long-tried and exemplary fidelity.

“But you have *no* nobleness of soul—you have *no* generosity of feeling. I believe I must have been mistaken in supposing that you ever had! Heartless, heartless, Termagan! I regret

my love for you ! I am a very fool, for my constancy ! It was thrown away on you, you cruel, unfeeling man ! My tears flow in vain at the manner in which I have been deceived ; and my heart must break, while you mock at me. But I will let every reader of every daily print know what your behaviour has been,—shabby old fellow ! I will expose your name, your person, your conduct, in every periodical journal in the kingdom : so that you shall be the execration of all generous-minded persons, and all chivalrous lovers. Yes, you shall be the scorn of every one who knows his alphabet, both *in* town, and *out* of town. You cannot hope to live long, Sir ! And then consider what perjury will rest upon your soul ! The term of my life, too, cannot reach to any very great extent—and listen, Sir ! if I die first,—what goadings of remorse will haunt you, while counting over your money-bags. My image shall be the incubus of your dreams, the torment of your waking thoughts ; and after death, Sirrah, I shall rise your bitterest accuser !*

* Miss Mirabelle reminds us of Dido in her invective against Æneas.—*Ed.*

“ You are at liberty to prevent the degradation of public exposure and universal obloquy, by coming and making the proper reparation, which in justice and conscience you are bound to do. I have mental and personal recommendations, as much as *you* ought ever to look for, in *our* nuptials ; and I have also property. I *ought*, I say But I will expostulate no more. I *demand*, Sir, instant justice, instant and ample reparation at your hands. It is too provoking to have wasted so many years for nothing else than to be laughed at ! Behave yourself as you ought to do, and as I insist upon your doing. I may then, perhaps, forget that I have had cause to upbraid you as I have.

“ CLORINDA MIRABELLE.”

“ P. S. I thank Heaven, if nothing else may avail, there is, (at least I hope so,) justice to be had : there are damages, I hope, to be had for unprincipled breaches of matrimonial vows, however long ago they may have been plighted, —as to that, Sir, I shall gain instruction.”

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCTORY STILL. — AN EXPLANATION
AFTER THIRTY YEARS OR SO, BEING VERY
MATTER-OF-FACT.

WHETHER it was the hint I threw out in my letter of my having property, or whether my threats of different sorts alarmed him, I know not, but certainly the epistolary ventilation of my anger, just set forth, had the effect of bringing the object of it to my door at least,—if not to—reason.

The day after he received it, he called on me: up he came, poking into the room, with an air of pretended surprise “at what could have been the cause of so much warmth of language on my part?”

“Did you not deserve it, Sir?” I said, “*did* you not deserve it?”

“Deserve it, Ma’am? Deserve it? For what? I can’t think what could ail you, or make you practise your *romancing* at such a rate upon me?”

“Then, Sir, I must tell you again, that it was your insincerity of behaviour that occasioned my writing to you as I did. Are you not too conscious ——”

“Mrs. Mirabelle, how hasty you are!” he exclaimed, interrupting me. “What could put into your head to couple me with the subject of insincerity? I cannot guess what grounds you have for so doing. I have, I assure you, thought neither of sincerity nor insincerity, with reference to yourself or any other woman in England, since my return.”

“I am shocked to hear you talk thus! You ought to have understood, I should think, that sincerity was due to the early pledge of affection which you gave me on leaving England. . . .”

“Gracious!” he ejaculated to himself,—“an old story, I suppose, of I don’t know how many years ago—hardly recollect such a thing!”

“ Yes, I say that sincerity to *that* pledge was due to me, whereas, . . . let me ask, what signs of affection—what emotion did you ever show the other day, when you saw me fainting and weeping for joy at your return ?”

“ Ridiculous ! Signs of affection ! emotion ! absurd ! Why, my good Mrs. Mirabelle, how very extravagantly you talk ! I declare I do not understand what you expect from me, or why you rave so about sincerity and affection, either at the present moment, or as you did in your letter, of which I shall take notice immediately. Do tell me, how you can expect emotion from a man of my years ? You talk as if I were some youthful lover ; and must surely mean to laugh at me. Why, you cannot expect me to sigh, and swear, and kneel, and vow, and caper, and groan, and whine, and protest, as if I had never had the liver complaint or the lumbago ? If you do, you’re much mistaken, I assure you !”

“ I think a *little*, Sir, would not have been misapplied—you were actually reading the newspaper, and talking of the stocks :—such a total

indifference was, I think, a little too”.....

“ Talking of the stocks!” interrupted he, “ to be sure I was—why?—must not a man have an eye to his interests? Have I been toiling abroad in a hot country all my life to gain an independence? and shall I not then keep an eye to securing it? However much respect I may have for you, Madam, it may surely be allowed to be divided with the subject of my own interests?”

“ RESPECT, say you, Mr. Albert Conroy !—*that* was not the word which you were once accustomed to use in speaking to me—a more tender designation expressed the feeling you once used to cherish for me.”

“ A more tender designation !” he cried out, laughing, “ why, Lord ! Mrs. Mirabelle !”

“ *Miss*, if you please, Sir,” I interrupted, with a becoming hastiness of manner, that might by some have been called pettish.

“ Well then, *Miss* Mirabelle, you should really talk in a different style to an old person like myself. You don’t suppose I am a hero of romance—do you?—No, not I ! I love claret

and turtle and good curry ; all that rant which you have been making use of towards me, I consider just so much d——d nonsense. *Do* talk reasonably, and you will find me a pleasant sort of person enough, I dare say, for the matter-of-fact man I am, thank God ! There, Ma'am, let me offer you a pinch of snuff !" added he, extending his snuff-box towards me, while he applied nearly a handful to his own nostrils.

I need not say that I turned from his offer with disgust, while I answered him with renewed indignation.

" You astonish me, Sir !.....I see, though, how matters stand—do not think to dissembleyour affections have been lavished on some other object. Object do I say ? Ay, *objects*, you profligate man ; and I dare say you are conscious I am naming you, as you deserve,—but do not pretend to hide your conduct from me. The eye of an injured female detects too well the base machinations of perfidious men like yourself !"

" Now you must really talk more reasonably to me, Mrs. Mirabelle," (" *Mrs.* again !" said

I to myself impatiently) “ for I do not comprehend one word of all that you say ; and I shall begin to think you are *cracked* as badly as poor Jenkyns, if you do not change your tone. Your letter to me I as little comprehend as your present language ; and so beg leave to return it to you.”

He drew it out of his pocket, and extended it to me : I declined accepting it, tossing up my head in token of disapprobation of his treating it with so little respect : after laying it down on the table, he continued, “ And now, Ma’am, to come to *business*,” (“ Odious word !” I again ejaculated to myself) “ you say that you have been waiting these thirty years, in expectation of my return to England to marry you ; and you also say, that you have rejected you don’t know how many offers, on account of your pledge to me !”

“ Millions, and excellent ones too !” I exclaimed.

“ Very well, be it so : I can only say that I am very sorry for it—but why did you do so ? I never considered you as engaged to me, or

under any obligation of waiting for my return. This must have been pretty plain, I should think, to any one whose head had not been turned with the nonsense of romance, by my never writing a line to you about myself, whilst abroad. Why, do you suppose I should have omitted writing to you, if I had conceived that there was any such engagement as you mention existing between us?"*

"As to that, I cannot answer, Sir: I can only say that you vowed to me you loved me, and that you *always* would do so as long as you lived. Yes *that* you did! those were your words on parting. I have them down in black and white, in your own hand-writing."

"Well! what if I had sworn a thousand times over that I would *always* love you? You must surely know as well as myself, that young people ever talk in this wild hyperbolical style—making extravagant declarations dictated by the enthusiasm of the moment, but

* The Editor, for his part, when he calls to mind the reasonable love-epistle that Mr. Conroy wrote in his youth, (B. 2) is not so surprised as Miss Mirabelle, to find him thus matter-of-fact here.—*Ed.*

which they can never accomplish, or be expected to accomplish. All that was said by me in this style, should have been treated by you as it deserved—as so much childish nonsense; and assuredly so, when you heard nothing more of me. I little expected, on coming quietly to see you after my return, to be assailed with a recital of childish trash which I had forgotten:—how could you rake up now,—or treasure up so long—such nonsense?”

“You astonish me, Sir. I repeat it, you astonish me! If this is the construction which is to be put on oaths, they had better never be pronounced, and never henceforth be treated as sacred. Your indifference appals and overwhelms me.”

“I am sorry for that. I am anxious to lead you to a *true* perception of things; concerning which you seem to entertain very erroneous notions. I should be glad that you were conscious of the *true* weight and importance which you should have imputed to youthful vows of the sort, on which you lay such stress; for it is high time you should be instructed!”

“ Then you *own* yourself perjured ? Effrontery unparalleled !”

“ I own myself to have been just as capable of uttering foolish things when young, as other youths are. Lord ! what a delusion you have been under for a whole third part of a century !”

“ Your trifling is most inexcusable ; so I beg, Sir, you will no longer continue it : I have been now sufficiently taught how much I have deceived *myself* (since you will not allow that *you* have deceived me)—so, no more of mockery, if you please ; but let me, Sir, ask you, whether you intend any farther to make game of me ? What are your intentions *now* that you *are* returned ?”

“ Intentions ! I have no intentions at all that I know of :—you want me to marry you, that is it, Ma’am, is it ?”

“ I wish you, Sir, to fulfil a sacred engagement ; and I do not understand how that is to be accomplished, unless it is by entering upon matrimonial measures !”

“ ‘Entering upon matrimonial measures!’ Lord! say at once, without mincing the matter, that you want me to marry you. That is what you want, and certainly not what I am prepared to do. How do you know that I could support an establishment?’ ”

“ Where love rules the breast, all worldly considerations vanish ! ”

“ Bah ! bah ! my good madam, no more of that stuff about love ! Consider your age and mine,—what property have you, Mrs. Mirabelle ? ”

“ *Mrs. Mirabelle !* ” again I exclaimed ; “ Sir, I have already observed to you that my name is *Miss Mirabelle !* ”

“ Well—*Miss Mirabelle*, then—what property have you ? ”

“ Mercenary question ! ”

“ Why, you know, we *must* understand how these matters stand, or else marriage may be only beggary. What funded property may you possess ? ”

“ Why, if you must know—I have something more than nine hundred a-year ! ”

“What! is that all?”

“I had, not long ago, a good deal more than that sum, but have lately sold out of the funds for the purpose of enabling me to complete the purchase of a farm and cottage some miles from town, which it is my intention to make my permanent residence.”

“And pray, is this your own house here in town?”

“No; this house I rent.”

“Have you a carriage?”

“Yes, and a carriage, Sir: you really are most pressingly minute in your inquiries.”

The sordid fellow was mumbling to himself, “nine hundred a-year—farm and cottage in the country,” when he abruptly ejaculated....

“How many acres have you, belonging to your farm? You know, we must be explicit on these points, if we wish to live....”

“Acres, Sir—I believe....”

“What rent do you receive in case you let the land belonging to the cottage?”

“About two hundred and seventy pounds a-year.”

“ Well and regularly paid ? Um ? ”

“ Pretty regularly. There is a small arrear of rent at present due, of about two years standing, in consequence of the pressure of the times, at the period at which I bought the estate. But we hope that things will come round shortly.”

“ *Come round !* Oh, Lord, no ! they are getting worse, I assure you ! ” he continued, muttering to himself, while he shook his head “ arrears of *two* years ”—then he again lifted his head up abruptly, and asked, “ Have you any plate, jewels, pictures, books, good serviceable furniture—um, eh ? ”

“ For shame, Sir !—desist, if you please, from demanding these paltry and vexatious details. What personal property I possess, will be seen in time : take it for granted at present, that I am not unprovided in these particulars, as your eyes may indeed convince you.”

“ I take nothing for granted, Ma'am—no, no, trust me for that ! I shall thank you to let me know a little more about the matter in point. What do you suppose would be the amount of

a valuation of all your goods, on a survey taken of them by a respectable appraiser?"

"Heavens! Mr. Conroy, I am really not able to answer that inquiry. You shock my delicacy!"

"Pooh, Ma'am! your delicacy! These things must be discussed, you know—about a thousand pounds, perhaps?"

"I dare say, about that: it may be more, or it may be less. I really do not feel able to answer, nor do I think you are by any means justified in being so precise."

The Indian kept on muttering to himself, his eyes bent on the ground—"Nine hundred a year—one thousand pounds worth of furniture, goods, and chattels—country house and land, two hundred and seventy pounds per annum—arrear of *two* years—that's unfortunate!—bad times, too—and becoming worse—hum! Not an over-good market—bad *spec*, I fear—will hardly suit Well, Ma'am," he said, getting up from his chair, "I will consider matters over by myself: meanwhile, do you write a line of inquiry to your tenant, relative to the time

when the arrears of rent are likely to be paid, and threaten to 'distrain' if payment is not speedily made. When you have given me a favourable report of this business, I will, perhaps, come and talk more to you upon the subject of matrimony. At present I must take my leave of you."

He left me, carrying with him, my most unqualified contempt for his narrow-minded and illiberal behaviour; still he left me with some glimpse of the grand object I had in view being yet attainable. I was therefore anxious to advance it as much as lay in my power, and accordingly made instant preparations for a visit to the country, considering that my own presence on the spot would be of much more avail than any communication with my tenant from a distance.

I felt the more satisfied, too, with the step I was about to take, as it had already been my intention to give up the noise of London for the retirement of my country residence; the lease too of my house in town, was now just expiring.

And this was the lover for whom I had been sighing from the dawn of life to its setting! This is the way in which I was repaid for my affection—in being forced to witness it mocked, as the raving of so much romance! Not a word of inquiry how my life had been passed since he left me,—whether I had lived happily or otherwise, or what had become of such of my friends as he had known.

The unfeeling wretch would, I dare say, never have called upon me at all, had he not learned from some stock-jobber that I had a little money in the funds; which is not improbable, as I had been obliged to employ some such an agent to ‘sell out’ for me, on the occasion just mentioned.

I confess, I did now most heartily repent having rejected so many advantageous offers: which, when my misguided scruples would not permit me to accept them, came showering upon me thickly enough; but were now reduced to one forlorn hope, the frustration of which it was a subject of the greatest anxiety to me to prevent.

Such is the law of contradictions which, either in the affairs of man or of woman, predominates with a sway, whose untoward influence, I am, in my present vexation of mind, inclined to think universal !

CHAPTER III.

“LA BELLE MIRABELLE” RETIRES TO HER TUSCULAN, AND COMMENCES RUSTIC.—A SPECIMEN OF HER MORNINGS IN A COUNTRY VILLAGE.

THE style of living at a country village was by no means new to me, for I had, since the purchase of my estate, paid it frequent visits, had made myself well known all over the village, and had become fully acquainted with what few persons there were in the place to know. Nor was I at all sorry to bid the vanities of town adieu, when so many causes had conspired to make it advisable that I should quit them.

My cottage is situated at no great distance from the road, from which it is approached by

a winding gravel drive through a shrubbery, and thickly bordered with perriwinkles. The cottage itself is in the Elizabethan style: all the land about it that I retain in my own hands is my garden, merely—the rest is in the occupation of my tenant.

To this person, I lost no time on my arrival, in applying for payment of his arrears of rent; the answer which he made me was, that he was very sorry at not being able to satisfy my demands at present—that he hoped to let me have half the arrear in about six months time from thence, and to complete the payment in, perhaps, a twelvemonth. He of course did not forget to beg me to take the hard times into consideration, and assured me he would do his best to perform his promise of payment. Before he withdrew, I told him that I was in just as great distress as he was himself, and that although I was willing to make every fair allowance for the pressure of the times, yet that I should really be compelled to have recourse to harsh measures, unless he fulfilled what he engaged to do. Meantime he inspired me with a certain

degree of confidence, and I shall therefore address myself to the mention of my village life in tolerably good spirits.

Where the circle of society is so limited as it is, in a country village, a single old maid can only support existence by making the most of the few persons about her, as instruments for affording gossip. Exclusive of the ‘good wives’ of the village; the clergyman and his wife—the squire and his dame—constitute almost entirely what is called “the neighbourhood.” And since “the neighbourhood” did not make any great advances towards keeping up an acquaintance with me, I was obliged, in my own defence, to go about, beating up the quarters of “the neighbourhood.”

As I generally favour my village friends with a visit whenever the weather permits, dropping in amongst them, when it is not perhaps always the most convenient, I fancy they are inclined to consider me as rather an annoyance. This I cannot help: used as I have been to living amongst my fellow creatures, to deny myself the limited resource of what gossip a village

may afford, would condemn me to a load of *ennui*, utterly insupportable.

The portion of gossip that I enjoy, I find quite as much as affords me the necessary excitation that every one requires; beyond that, I do not wish to be excited; and the whirl and bustle of a routine of gaiety, would now positively worry me to death. I begin to find that one's feelings alter with age. I mean to say, that though not so very elderly, yet I feel much less gay and sprightly than I did before; and therefore find no small satisfaction in my retirement to the country.

So now for my morning trot to "the neighbourhood." Of course, before I am fairly afloat on my way, there are some little preliminary fidgetings to be gone through with my maid,—Patty she is called,—a country girl, but handy and tolerably careful on the whole. Then I have an old coarse country cook, who can just roast, boil, bake, and poach an egg—a village hind to attend the garden, and a young bumpkin, by way of a footboy, whose name is Tom. Tom I have just presented with a livery of

brown, and a handsome new pair of “velve-teens,” as the Stultz of the village calls them. The boy’s head is almost turned by the change of apparel: I picked the varlet up hoeing turnips in a smock frock, and seeing that he might be made a decent lad, if properly trained, I caused him to reject his hoe and smock frock, and come and clean shoes for me, and walk behind me in my expeditions to the village.

He used to accompany me with a basket in his hand, for the reception of such wares as I might purchase in the course of my peregrination. But Patty will be offended, if I do not say a word or two about herself, by way of compliment. Her dress is of grey stuff, her height about the middle size, her hair dark, her best cap of the genuine lace of the village, surmounting a low forehead, cherry cheeks, and a little broad face, and freckled pug nose. The great fault of the girl’s person consists in her coarse red fingers: otherwise, she is one of the most decent country girls almost that I at present remember having seen.

But having now put on my walking things,

I am in a hurry to go out while the weather is fine; and therefore commence giving directions to Patty, as I go down stairs:—my voice raised to a pitch of shrillness not the most musical.

“Patty! is Tom ready with the basket?”

“He is waiting, Madam, at the garden gate; I saw him followed by Pug, and am pretty nearly certain he had the basket in his hand.”

“Very well: now take care, Patty, if any gentleman or lady should chance to call whilst I am out, that you beg them to sit down, and say that I shall be back almost directly.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Mind you don’t, for the world, send them away. I would not lose the news they might bring, on any account.”

“Oh! no, Ma’am.”

“And take care, Patty, now poor Torty (a tortoiseshell cat) has kittens, to let her have *plenty* of milk.”

“Oh! yes, Ma’am.”

“And has the man come with the samples of kidney potatoes from ——? Why did you not bid him leave some the last time he was here?”

And when does the old man from —— call with his basket of Yorkshire cakes? And, Patty, mind and tell the cook not to boil the pudding too much to-day, and to put a *leetle* more spice into it. Oh! Tom is ready, I see, —has he got the umbrella as well as the basket?”

“ Yes, Ma’am !” screams Patty, from above stairs.

I hurry off without having waited to elicit the several answers that might be made to my volley of interrogatories; which are generally squalled aloud in this manner from the staircase, while my maid is above, setting my room to rights.

A pretty figure should I make in town, were I to be seen as I am accustomed to appear in these my rural gaddings.

The extreme fretting to which I have been lately subjected, has made me many degrees thinner, both in face and person; my features have become sharpened, and my look far less amiable :—when the east wind blows and puckers up the skin, making the tip of my nose look

blue, I may even be said to look cross and crabbed.

A large, coarse, yellow, straw bonnet, plaited by the village children, and decorated with yellow ribands, serves as my head gear : from underneath it, hang two fells, or ringlets of sandy-coloured false hair, on each side ; they, in some measure, hide the prominency of my cheek bones, and relieve the sallowness of my complexion, or *no*-complexion, better than hair of a darker shade. Alas ! what ravages will not fretting effect upon beauty ! But this is not the extent of the mischief it has done me. My eyes are sunken and weak, and have forced upon me the use of spectacles, which have made a conspicuous ridge across my nose. Also, the loss of my eyebrows does not add to the beauty of my appearance : I wear a brown silk spencer, which is met at the waist by a buff-coloured gown, and these, together with a dingy-looking white and yellow shawl, complete the description of my rustic exterior.

But does this description comprise all that is necessary to convey to the reader an ade-

quate idea of the old maid, who is like myself, a village gossip? He must also picture to himself my starch and erect gait and manner of moving, which will easily be imagined, when I mention that my head is erect, my back stiffened, or rather bridled up, my chin poked forward and perpetually being bobbed about, with a prying, scrutinizing restlessness; my walk is a waddle, my steps being short and quick, and wriggling as I do from my hips, the attitude that I present must be rather in the caricature style.

Again I must observe, that this portrait of my appearance will have been given but in vain, unless my friend, the reader, also bears in mind the bustling, fidgety character of my manner, tone, and address. In the look, in the air, the voice, the dress, the gait, the countenance, the manner—in all these must the personification of gossip and fidget, which I afford in myself, be sought: and in the *combination* of all these qualities alone. And here I ought to observe, from dear-bought experience, that it is not till the old maid has been crossed,

irredeemably perhaps, with disappointment, that she becomes confirmedly crabbed and fidgety. It is at that crisis, generally speaking, that she will be witnessed as answering to the portrait which I have just drawn of myself. Previously to this, she may have been indeed some time an old maid: and her certain age marked by whatever whims and characteristic oddities she may possess, as has been witnessed in the instance of myself and my friend Lady Kate: but she is not yet the inveterate beldam that will usually present herself to the mind's eye as the *beau-idéal** of an "Old Maid."

But it is time that myself and Tom should set off on our expedition. Every body I meet, that is at all likely to afford me a few minutes indulgence in prating, I accost, and stop on the way. Just at this moment I saw somebody, who, I thought, presented himself in a "questionable shape." "Tom, who is that on the other side of the road?"

"Master Sparks's out-door man, Jack Chedhorn, *Mum*."

* Or rather, the *vilain-ideal*.—C. M.

“The Squire’s man! so it is!—well!—I *must just* step over the way, to ask him after his master—come along, Pug! Tom, do you stand here until I come back; I shall not be gone above a minute, I dare say.”

I fancied, as I crossed over the road, that “Master Sparks’s man” quickened his pace, as if to get on before me and avoid a colloquy, but I was rather too alert for him, and brushed up to his side briskly, with the salutation, “How d’ye do, Chedhorn?” and “How is your master, Mr. Sparks, this morning?”

“Oh, thank ye, *Mum*, I can’t say much for him!”

“I shall certainly step up to the Hall and see him—so sorry to have heard—”

“Now, Lord bless you! *Mum*, don’t you go a-nigh him this morning—there’s a good lady, now! No one *dustn’t* hardly dare *spake* to him!”

“Why, what is there so much the matter, James?”

“Oh! only one of *them* twinges!”

“What! that is all, is it? A little gout! Why I should think now, he would be glad to see a friend!”

“ *All!* do you say? I think it is enough too—I only advise you not to go *a-nigh* him *now*, *howiver!*”

“ Now, Chedhorn—tell me the truth now—is not the squire a little too much given to the bottle—um? You know you may tell *me!*”

“ Lord! Miss Mirabelle! how *can* you ask me to say *sich* things of my master?”

“ Well, then, is not he now and then rather cross to Mrs. Sparks? I think I’ve heard that they quarrel!—yes, and shockingly too—you know you may tell *me!*”

“ Mercy on you, *Mum*, how *can* you suppose *I* knows any thing about these matters? How *can* you *ax* *sich* questions? But I must be going about my business now,” said the man, moving onwards.

“ Dear! what can make you in such a hurry, pray?—you must surely have some message of importance—come *do* let me hear what it is, there’s a good man!”

“ That’s no *consarn* of yours, *Mum!*” interrupted the man, brushing hastily away, beyond the power of being retarded any longer; so back I crossed the road to Tom, my curiosity puz-

zling itself to know what could be the reason of the squire's man being in such an unreasonable hurry.

This subject of speculation was dispersed as soon as some new theme for curiosity presented itself: and a glimpse of a blue apron and straw bonnet, just as I turned the corner of the lane which brought me into the village, for the present entirely banished from my thoughts the errand of Mr. Sparks's man.

“ 'Tom, were you able to tell who that person was that passed to the right, a little distance on ?' ”

“ It was Mrs. Sawnley's maid, *Mum*.”

“ Ay, Mrs. Sawnley's, the clergyman's wife.”

“ Yes, Mum, the *clergymunt's misses*.”

“ *Wife*, or lady, you should say, Tom, not mistress, as if you were speaking of my tenant's wife, Mrs. Jolt. Dear me ! there was something I wanted to ask that maid. Oh ! it was about the jelly—Tom, make haste and run after Mrs. Sawnley's maid, and just ask her to be so good as to let me know whether her mistress does not put *gooseberry* wine into her jelly, and not Madeira. The last time I tasted it, I

was certain it was made with some home-made wine, and I have forgotten to clear up my mind to this day about it. Now mind and remember what I tell you to ask; there,—now say after me, “*gooseberry* wine, and not Madeira.”

Tom did so thus, “*Gooseberry* wine, and not . . . not” . . .

“Madeira, Sir!”

“Madie—I don’t *joostly* know that word,” said the loon, and would have scratched his head, had it not been covered, for the first time in his life, with a hat: as it was, his claws were being raised up to his numscull.

“Madeira, dunce!” I exclaimed,—“well—you will recollect *gooseberry* at any rate.”

“Oh, yis, *Mum*.”

“There, make haste, then; you will find me when you come back, talking with Mrs. Blinke—there run along, do!”

Mrs. Blinke was a decent village matron, who kept a school, at which girls were taught to plait. “I may as well ‘just step in,’” said I to myself, “and ask one or two little things I have to say to the old woman.” I looked in at the door of her cottage, and with an encouraging

smile and nod of the head, addressed the matron, as she curtsied to me.

“How do you do, Mrs. Blinke; how goes on your school? I suppose you have some pretty plait-workers now, amongst your number? Does little Peggy begin to plait the five straw plait yet?”

‘Under, one; and over, two;
Pull it tight, and that will do.’”

I continued, stroking Peggy’s flaxen pate.

“Make a curtsy to the lady that asks so civil about you, Peggy!”

“That’s a good girl,” I said; “you mind and improve in your plaiting, and you shall make me a new straw bonnet against next summer. By the by, Mrs. Blinke, does Mrs. Sparks ever have a bonnet of the children’s working?”

“Now and then she does, Ma’am, but”....

“Rather *near*, eh? You may tell *me*, you know, without being afraid.”

“Why, she is not an *over* good customer.”

“Ay, I should not wonder—has a coarse

straw bonnet once in three years, eh? Never has one of split or chip straw, I dare say? um! how is that?"

"Why, I must say, it is some time sence she had a bonnet of us, and it was not the nicest sort neither, which she had; but we hope that the *young* ladies will perhaps be better customers."

"No, no, Mrs. Blinke, I dare say not; they ake after the mother, be sure. Pray what might you charge her for her last bonnet? I dare say she grumbled? Come! you know you may tell *me*!"

Before the old woman had answered this question, which she seemed to feel a little awkwardness in doing, Tom had returned from his mission.

"Well, Tom!" I said, "what answer have you brought back about the jelly?"

"None at all, Mum, about the jelly."

"Then about what else, pray?"

"Why, she said I was a saucy young *fellur*, for asking her about things that I hadn't no

business with, and said you were as bad as myself."

"The impudent jade! I should never have dreamt of receiving such an answer.—Good morning to you, Mrs. Blinke:—now mind, Peggy, my dear, if you improve, you are to make me a bonnet. Come along, Tom! I have no notion of such impertinence. I shall go up to the Parsonage this moment, and inquire of Mrs. Sawnley herself."

I had soon arrived before the gate belonging to the pales that fronted the Parsonage-house. Tom opened it, and I walked up to the door. I found it wide open; nobody seemed to be in the way. I looked into the rooms on each side of the passage, but could find nobody; and after peeping and peering about for a few minutes, bethought me of ringing the bell.

The ringing brought no creature to the door but a terrier; who came barking into the passage through a back door, and alarmed poor Puggy, who took his stand behind his mistress, perking up his tail and then dropping it again,

accordingly as the terrier seemed amicably inclined or otherwise. I proceeded now to walk up-stairs, conceiving that the terrier's barking had sufficiently announced the presence of a stranger. Up I went, and popped my head in at the drawing-room door, much to the discomfiture of Mrs. Sawnley, who was in great trepidation, shuffling a number of papers into the table-drawer, evidently in a manner that bespoke my presence to be no small interruption.*

I fancied I heard her say to herself as I came into the room—"Gracious! here is that prying, gossiping creature, Miss Mirabelle, I am sure!"

"I hope I have not interrupted you, my dear Mrs. Sawnley," I said; "I am afraid you are engaged?"

"Oh! no, I assure you, Miss Mirabelle; nothing of any consequence, indeed,—(tsa, tsa, dear! dear! how tiresome! in the middle of settling all my accounts.")

* The Editor takes this opportunity of observing to the reader, that the characters in Books III. and IV. are, with some few exceptions, real: nor less authentic, is the characteristic inquisitiveness, here, of the heroine.—*Ed.*

Mrs. Sawnley was, generally speaking, one of those over-civil persons that will contradict themselves a thousand times in order to agree with you, but at present was a little too much put out of her way to exhibit her usual acquiescence. She was of the middle stature, white-haired, and rather peaked-faced. Her voice was drawling. If in the present instance her courtesy led her to express that she did not feel my visit an interruption, her manner seemed very much to contradict what she said.

“ I am really afraid,” I said again, “ that you are very busy just at present.”

“ Oh, no, indeed ! I am most delighted to see you, I assure you ! (Dear, dear ! tsa, tsa, provoking !)”

“ You seem to have nobody at home, Mrs. Sawnley ; how is that ? Where is Mr. Sawnley ?”

“ I really am not quite certain ; I believe though, that he is gone down to the church to marry a couple.”

“ Marry a couple !—indeed ? rich or poor ? . . . who, pray ?—who may they be ?”

“ I declare I do not know : pray, my *dear*

Miss Mirabelle, did you observe what o'clock it was as you came past the church: it was very good of your calling—but what makes me ask, is, that I have some tradesmen coming shortly to speak with me.”

“ Oh ! I suppose that was what made you so busy just as I came up-stairs—by-the-by I wanted to speak with one of the tradesmen; their coming here soon, is very *apropos*. If you will allow me, I will sit here till they come.”

This piece of intelligence was a sad damp upon Mrs. Swanley's “ civil hint” to me to withdraw; she was therefore obliged to behave with resignation, and put up with the inconvenience which my visit occasioned her. Whilst she continued to ejaculate, “ dear, dear !” to herself, I proceeded with my inquiries; “ You must really excuse me, my dear Mrs. Sawnley, but upon my word, by the number of bills you seemed to be putting into the table-drawer as I came in, you must be a pretty good customer to the people here. Mr. S. is well off, I take it—a good profitable benefice this,—um ?” I said, nodding my head significantly.

“Indeed, Miss Mirabelle,” answered Mrs. Sawnley colouring, “I wish I were able to gratify your curiosity I”

“Oh! I do not wish to be inquisitive—I only judged by appearances that you were pretty comfortably off. What a very pleasing pattern that carpet is of!”

“Yes, we do indeed think it a *very* pretty pattern.”

“An ‘Axminster,’ or a ‘Wilton,’ I suppose,” said I, stooping down and touching it with my finger; “you would hardly have a Brussels, I should think?”

I have no sort of remorse in asking these questions: “the neighbourhood” is my prey; and though inquisitiveness be a vulgar crime, of which I could never heretofore accuse myself, yet, in my present circumstances, I rather triumph in it.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Mirabelle, this is a Brussels carpet,” replied Mrs. Sawnley, her feeling of indignation struggling with her habitual civility.

“Oh, I did not wish to offend; I was merely

deceived in the *appearance* of the thing. You have not got your curtains up, I see—you must surely have saved them a pretty good time: I dare say ten or a dozen years. I should not be surprised,—um?”

“ You must really, my *dear* Miss Mirabelle, excuse my answering such a question as that. I cannot say exactly how long we have had the curtains belonging to this room: pray do you *really* wish particularly to know?”

“ Oh, no! I should be sorry to put you to the slightest inconvenience about any such thing—but the truth is, I am obliged to look about me a little as to other people’s establishments, as I may possibly have, some little time hence, to keep house myself,—on a rather larger scale than I do just at present.”

The significant look with which this hint was thrown out, as well as the hint itself, afforded Mrs. Sawnley a piece of gossip that in some measure made her amends for the disquietude and displeasure occasioned her by my questionings; and she, in her turn, seemed solicitous to address a little inquiry towards myself.

“What, Miss Mirabelle! are you then thinking of changing your name? dear, dear! I shall be so delighted to hear of your happiness! Pray, when, might I ask, may you be looking forward to any such event?”

“Oh, not just yet, Mrs. Sawnley,” I replied; “but I hope the time may not be very far off. I have only dropped a hint that such a thing *might* happen: it is not certain *yet*.”

“Oh! not certain *yet*.”

“No—yes—that is—*hardly* just yet: but *you* shall be the first person, my dear Mrs. Sawnley, to hear of the news when it is at all likely that what I have hinted at may take place.”

“Oh! my *dearest* Miss Mirabelle, I’m sure you flatter me with your confidence—indeed you do! But here comes Mr. Sawnley!”

In truth, so it was: Mr. Sawnley himself entered the room. The term expressing the character of his tone of voice, and boorish drawling utterance, put me in mind of his name—it was sawney: sawney was he too in gait, as well as in countenance. His mouth

was always open, and his hair rubbed straight down on his head; his whiskers red: the expression of his face, and the interesting character of his features may be well imagined from this portrait. But all these disqualifications might, comparatively speaking, have been overlooked, if Mr. Sawnley had not possessed a most atrociously vulgar provincial accent.

To instance some of the gothicisms of his pronunciation, I shall observe that whenever there happened to be a "g" at the end of a word, he sounded it very hard, as if it had been "ghe." Again he would pronounce the word "one" not "wun" but "won." Of other vulgarisms, too, might he be accused, and of course, was guilty of that very common one of aspirating vowels, and taking away the aspirate where it should rightly be pronounced. These faults will be observable in the specimens which will be given of his conversation. It should be also farther observed, that the drawl with which he spoke, was accompanied by a rather loud, and very nasal, twang.

On entering the room, Mr. Sawnley thus addressed me, "*Ow* d'ye do, Miss Mirerbelle.

I've been marrynghe a couple down at the church, as I dare say you *ave eard* from Mrs. Sawnley."

"Yes, Mrs. Sawnley informed me that you were absent on some such duty—it must be rather an agreeable one too—you pocket a little sum, I fancy?" said I, smiling, and nodding my head.

"Why, yes, Miss Mirerbelle, the 'labourer is worthy of his ire,' but as people generally *hunderstand* this, they don't think it worth while to be *haskinghe* the questions which you do," replied Mr. Sawnley, getting up from his chair rather huffily, and walking towards the door.

"Oh, dear! I hope you are not angry at my asking a trifling question, Mr. Sawnley; I would not for the world have said a syllable about it if I thought it could have offended—you are not going away, surely?"

"It is no matter, Miss Mirerbelle—but I cannot stay to talk more with you, as I must go now and finish the *sermunt* I was writinghe when called off to the church."

"Pray sit down for one moment, Mr. Sawn-

ley? I—dare say,” I said, turning to Mrs. S. “Mr. Sawnley does not always write his sermons himself. Now does he, Mrs. Sawnley?”

“Why not *always*; do you, Michael?” said his engaging wife.

“Why, I am thinking*he* that I do not *hal-*ways; for *hex*ample, when I’m in a *urry*, I do not compose a *discoorze*: I *ate* *urryinghe* the composition of my *sermuunts*.”

“Ah! the gentlemen of the cloth have a pretty easy time of it, I fancy; and their life must be uncommonly pleasant when they obtain such pretty pickings as *you* have here, Mr. Sawnley. If I were not afraid of offending, I perhaps might venture to ask what, about, you would take for your tithes in this parish a year?—a good round sum, I’ll be bound for it.”

“I don’t *hex*actly care about *hansweringhe* that question, Miss Mire*rbelle*, any more than I did the last you *hasked* me. And if you had remembered what I told you about the dooties of neighbours last Sunday, you would not now have thought of being so *hinq*uisitive.”

“Dear me, Mr. Sawnley! I have no wish to be inquisitive, I assure you, or to interfere

with other people's concerns: the question inadvertently escaped me. Such observations, you know, Mrs. Sawnley, *will* escape one in the country, where there is so *little* to talk about; that you will allow."

"Why, dear, yes! that is really true, Miss Mirabelle, I must admit," said Mrs. Sawnley, in her most acquiescent tone.

"Yes, Ma'am," rejoined the clergyman, "it may so be, that there *his* little to talk about in the country; but you must *hexcuse* me for saying*he*, that what little there *his* to be said, *hought* not to consist in *haskinghe*—(I was going*he* to say—) *himpertinent* questions."

After this bitter admonition, Mr. Sawnley withdrew in sad huff, to finish the "sermunt he had been writing*he*;" and I turned to Mrs. Sawnley, requesting her, if she had no objection, to allow me to walk down stairs with her, and look at the new scullery she had just been building. I considered that I might thus be afforded a chance of seeing the cook making the jelly, and so discover the object of my question to Mrs. S.'s maid.

Mrs. Sawnley was, on her part, too glad to

get me down stairs out of the room, and so lost no time in complying with my request. As we passed through the kitchen to the scullery, there did I behold the cook in the very operation of making the jelly, concerning which, I entertained suspicions relative to the inferiority of its ingredients.

“ Dear !” cried I, “ what, you are making jelly, Mrs. Sawnley ? Might I be allowed just to taste the least drop in the world ?”

“ Certainly ! by all means ! Bridget, give Miss Mirabelle a little jelly in a tea-cup, if there are no glasses in the way, for her to taste it.”

“ Very nice indeed !” I said, putting the jelly, which was quite warm and liquid, to my lips ; “ it tastes very agreeably—of the *gooseberry* wine with which it is made.”

“ Gooseberry wine, Miss Mirabelle ! Who ever makes jelly with gooseberry wine ?—You are much mistaken, I assure you,” answered Mrs. Sawnley, in a manner that showed she was not “ best pleased” with my remarks.

“ I ’m sure there is no gooseberry wine in

that jelly," said the cook indignantly, "unless sherry wine is the same as 'gooseberry wine.'"

"Dear me! how very bad my taste must be then," I said.

After this unfortunate remark, we went on towards the scullery. The moment we had entered it, I observed to Mrs. Sawnley, "You will excuse me if I just observe, that I don't think you had that girl in your service when I last peeped into your kitchen:—a new scullery girl, is she not?"

"Yes, she is lately come to us but don't you think, Miss Mirabelle, that our new scullery is more commodious than the old one, and better fitted up?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Sawnley, you must not be offended—but,—*would* you allow me *just* to ask, what wages you give your cook and this girl—in such a family as *your's*?—Not above thirty-five pounds a-year to both of them together—now do you?"

"Really, really, Miss Mirabelle," replied the civil lady, now quite indignant, "I will be much obliged to you to desist from asking me

any thing more about my establishment—or what I pay my servants. You must really excuse me from informing you—and I am now sorry to be obliged to leave you, as I find my tradesmen are waiting to speak with me.”

As I had gained as much information from Mrs. Sawnley as it was likely I should, and had satisfied my curiosity as to the composition of the jelly, I did not any longer trouble her with my company, and so took my leave of the parsonage-house, followed in cavalcade by Tom and my pug, as I had come. My course was now bent towards the quarters of Squire Sparks, concerning whose condition I felt a curiosity, in consequence of the account which “his man,” Jack Chedhorn, had thrown out, as I met him on my way to the village.

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING GADDINGS CONTINUED—

“JUST STEPPING UP” TO THE SQUIRE’S.—

RECREATIONS AT HOME.

THE Squire’s house was situated in the middle of a park, of moderate size: it was a venerable, old-fashioned building, and the respectability of its appearance was heightened by some ancient elms, that spread their branches in a long and wide avenue before it. Through this avenue did Tom, my pug, and I, waddle up to the portico of the house. If Puggy was terrified by the salute of the terrier at Mrs. Sawnley’s, how did his poor little heart tremble, and his tail curl down between his legs, when the deep baying of a long-eared talbot echoed through the hall, as we pulled the handle of the bell at the hall-door.

The Squire had been in his time a great sportsman, but was now rather too infirm, from habits of intemperance, to follow his favourite pastime, and had for some time been tormented with gout. Coarse and blunt in manner, and loud in voice, he put one much in mind of the country squires of more than half a century ago: he rejoiced in having every thing about him in the old style, was more proud of his venerable country house than he would have been of a palace of modern erection, and was more flattered by the title of 'Squire,' than if he had the refusal of fifty new baronies. Two or three favourite old hounds, one of which was of the scarce breed that was now baying, in announcement of our arrival, were constantly at his side—the companions of his more vigorous days, and witnesses of his best feats in the chase. When he was for a short time relieved of the attacks of gout, he used to mount his old hunter, and trot after the pack, just to look at the field, and see the hounds throw off. Shooting, for which he had always entertained contempt, in comparison with the noble and more venturous sports of the chase, he

would now and then put up with; for it was in vain for a man who had never studied any thing but “Bracken’s Farriery,” “Markham,” and “Blome,” to look for any mental employment within doors. The consequence was, that his life had often been a mere blank, when the weather did not permit him to go abroad, and either hunt, or visit the kennel, or ride round the cover. With him, then, as with many persons similarly situated, and whose minds are furnished with an equal scantiness of resources, his vacant hours were soled by such gratifications as wine could afford; and in return for the debt of consolation which it lent him, it exacted payment by the infliction of heavy penalties of gout. In his wife he found little society; he had married her more for the sake of appearance than any thing else. Having an old mansion to keep up, it was necessary that he should have somebody at the head of his establishment;—all household matters he left to her management, and never would hear with patience any mention made of them to him.

His great companion was “his man,” Jack

Chedhorn, a person who acted as bailiff and game-keeper, and in all out-of-door matters was "every thing" to him, to use his own expression. On my asking the servant, as he opened the door, whether Mrs. Sparks was at home, he informed me that she was not, but that both herself and the Misses Sparks were in town: and on a similar inquiry relative to Mr. Sparks, I also received an answer that he was "not at home."

This seemed uncommonly like a hint that *I* was not wanted; but it had not the desired effect, so I told the servant that I thought he must be mistaken as to *Mr.* Sparks; for I had but a short time ago met the bailiff, Chedhorn, from whom I had been sorry to learn that his master was laid up with the gout, and, as this was the case, I could not possibly do otherwise than *just step in* and look at him. The servant appeared rather confounded at my pertinacity, and begged me to wait a moment; that he did not think I could see his master at that moment; and went away to announce the unwelcome intelligence of my arrival.

For fear the man should be sent back with a flat refusal, from his blunt, surly master, to admit me, I went gently on tip-toe, along the matting, up to the door of the dining-room, which was the room occupied by the gouty squire,—when, what was my misfortune to overhear from him?

“ Good God ! why did you let her in ? a boring, old, gossiping, prying b—h ! ”

“ I could not help it, Sir ; she already knew you were at home.”

“ Who told her ? d—n her ! ”

“ She says that she heard from Chedhorn that you were ill with the gout ; and therefore says, she is determined ‘ just to step in,’ and see how you are.”

“ How could Chedhorn be such a fool !—send him to me the moment he comes back—well, where is this boring, old—”

“ Here I am, Mr. Sparks,” I exclaimed, ushering myself into the room from behind the door, no longer able to preserve my eaves-dropping position, “ I was so sorry to hear of your being so much indisposed, that I thought it

would be 'neighbourly,' 'just to step in' and see you. And how do you find yourself now? Better, I hope?" I added, in a sympathetic kind of grumbling tone.

The agitation into which the Squire had been put by my self-introduction into the room, made his gout twinge more unmercifully than before, and he roared out with the pain as I spoke to him, just as if every syllable that issued from my lips had been so many drops of gall poured into a wound, or so many knives plunged into his disordered toe.

I should mention that he was sitting in a huge arm-chair, covered with maroon-coloured leather, close by a great blazing fire, which crackled away in a wide, old-fashioned hearth, on which were piled five or six ponderous logs of beech wood. The gouty leg was wrapped up in folds on folds of flannel, and rested on "an ease and comfort," as upholsterers call it. An old beagle couched himself down on the rug by his side, and the talbot was stretched at full length close before the fender. The room was wainscoted with oak pannels, the window-

frames of a ponderous and massy size, and receding from the line of the wainscot, at least three feet.

Both master and mansion brought me back to the days of our grandsires, and the bluff, hearty, old country squire was written on the red, weather-hardened face of Mr. Sparks: I speak particularly of his cheeks. The flush of his nose bespoke pretty well his intimacy with the bottle,—being itself, too, what is called a “bottle nose:” his person was somewhat corpulent, and his stature rather tall than short.

“Oh, good G—d!” he roared out, smarting with the twinge that pierced his unlucky toe, as I addressed him: “Oh, good G—d!”

When the pain seemed a little to subside, I ventured to open my lips again, seriously shaking my head as I spoke. “I am quite distressed to see you suffer so, Mr. Sparks; pray what remedies do you apply? I suppose you have tried the *eau médicinale*: but I fear that is but a temporary expedient, and not a very salutary one, considering the deleterious ingredients of which it is composed?” I received no other an-

swer to this lengthy and solicitous remark, than another roar of pain, louder than the former one. "Gracious!" I continued; "this is quite distressing: I wish I could be of any service, Mr. Sparks?"

"Oh! G—d! *you* can do nothing but let me alone," growled the Squire.

"And Mrs. Sparks absent too!" I continued; "such a sad pity just at this time!"

"Oh! G—d! she can do nothing any more than you. Oh, oh!"

"I am afraid you have not got your foot so well placed on the 'ease and comfort' as it might be: allow me just to arrange...."

"Oh! G—d! hold your hand, do! Oh! oh! merciful L—d! Keep off, do, for Heaven's sake! Oh! oh! oh!"*

These reiterated exclamations of pain and alarm had been excited by my accompanying my offer of assistance by a movement of my

* The classical reader will contemplate this scene as not unlike a burlesque on the miseries of Philoctetes, in Sophocles, which are occasioned by the wound in his foot.—*Ed.*

hand towards the afflicted part. Of course I drew it back, when I found its proffered assistance was considered so little available; and replacing it on my lap, continued the conversation, when the Squire seemed recovered from his apprehensions.

“ Pray, when do you expect Mrs. Sparks back from town ?”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Pray, are not the Miss Sparks with her ?”

“ Believe they are.”

“ I suppose the eldest has been ‘ out’ now some little time.”

“ Oh, Lord ! oh, God can’t tell ! (A ‘ d—n,’ muttered through the Squire’s teeth, closed this sentence.)

“ Your greenhouse is being kept in very pretty condition against her return. I have no doubt it is.”

“ You’d better go and see ! . . . (curse !)”

“ A mighty fine avenue of elms that, which you have in front of your house, Mr. Sparks ! I dare say these trees must be above a century old ?”

“ God knows ! I ’m sure *I* don’t. Go out and look at ’em, if you like ’em. Oh ! oh ! ”

“ And the sheep grazing about, look very picturesque ! A sweet place, upon my word ! this Ringwood Grange ! Oh, by the by, talking of sheep, I had a little remark to make to you if you will allow me,” I continued, drawing the county newspaper out of my *réticule*. “ I will just show you a paragraph that caught my eye this morning. I took notice of it because your name is mentioned in it. Oh, here it is. It is about a young man who was taken up and afterwards hanged, for sheep-stealing I thought it was just possible that he might be a —a—distant relation ”

I had not finished my sentence before the fury that this last observation on my part awakened in the Squire, made him roar and bellow more horribly than before.

“ D—n it ! what do you come here for, pestering me with such infernal questions ! ” was part of the vociferation which I most distinctly caught ; the rest consisted of oaths, and exclamations of pain. The noise he made roused up the dogs, who were used to his occasional

exclamations of pain, but could not make out what this superlative vociferation could mean; so they began barking and baying sufficiently to bring the house down over our heads; and as they evidently regarded me with looks that bespoke their notion of my not being over agreeable to their master, I entertained apprehensions that they might testify their attachment to him, by mauling myself, and I therefore thought it high time to withdraw.

This I did, amidst the continued oaths and exclamations of the Squire, saying as I went, that I hoped that nothing that had dropped from *me*, could have afforded him inconvenience; and trusting, that the next time I called, his *gouty humour* would be less violent.

“Lord! what a taking the man was in!” said I to myself pettishly, as I fidgeted out of the house down the avenue, “because one happened merely to make an innocent remark! Bless my soul!—Come along, Puggy; come along, Tom; let us be off!”

I remembered at this moment that I had not inquired concerning the purport of Chedhorn’s

errand, which occasioned me so much regret that I had a great desire to return and ask it: but, however, I thought reasonably, that it would be to no purpose, so I continued my way to the village. In passing through it, a thought which came into my head induced me ‘just to step in’ to the lace manufactory: “I’ll just inquire,” thought I, “which of the two, buys the most lace, the daughter of Jack Chedhorn, the Squire’s bailiff, or the Squire’s lady herself: we have already seen how stingy she is in her patronage of the straw bonnet manufactory!” I soon satisfied my curiosity on this point, and learnt that the bailiff’s daughter consumed just three times as much as Mrs. Sparks; and was therefore satisfactorily confirmed in my opinion, that that lady was rather ‘near.’

I bought two or three yards of lace, by way of patronizing the old lace-woman, and pursued my way back to my cottage. The walk I had taken was altogether a tolerably long one, as my cottage was distant from the village at least a quarter of a mile; and the Squire’s house was a good quarter of a mile beyond the village. However, I never used to feel fatigued with

such peregrinations ; but, on the contrary, was glad to address myself, on my return, to the inspection of my garden,—to talking with the gardener,—admiring my plants, watering my geraniums, and now and then attempting to persuade Puggy to eat gooseberries and currants.

The prominent features of my parterres, are hollyhocks—fine tall-stemmed plants, prim and erect as I am myself, and their flowers of the colour of my gown, of a buff complexion. Charming dowdy-looking plants ! I admire them above most others, as indeed I ought to do, since they are said to be emblematic of us single elderly ladies. Interspersed with these, and humbly rising at their feet, are double-stocks and wall-flowers. These, with evergreens scattered about, make a very pretty show. Immediately under my windows stand my geraniums ; and amongst them, one or two large myrtles of both sorts—the small and large leaved—in tubs. There is behind the cottage, a small green-house, with a few sweet-water and black Hamburgh grapes in it ; out of the produce of which I intend this summer making a small quantity of wine, by way of experiment.

In fact, the hopes which I at present entertain of a certain happy event, cause me to take an interest in making the most of my place. I also hope, that being in better spirits than I was some time ago, I may recover my good looks again—that is,—a little more of my juvenility of appearance, besides picking up somewhat more flesh on my bones.

When I am afraid of rain, and do not therefore venture far from my house, I take a telescope and direct it toward the village; and accordingly as the smoke seems to rise thickly or not from the chimneys of the different “folk,” I amuse myself with conjecturing what more they are to have for dinner that day than usual; besides puzzling over by myself whether they may be likely to entertain any guests—and who such guests may be:—by this ingenious method of speculation, I am afforded a good substitute for the enjoyment of more substantial gossip.

If the rain pours, or the wind blows so bleakly that I am altogether confined within doors, I occupy my time in prating with Patty and the

cook, or in reading, working, or strumming an air on the piano. Amongst other innocent recreations, I, a short time ago, devised the following, which, though it may appear whimsical, has, I think, the merit of novelty, and I am sure will afford much gratification to my dear friend, Lady Kate, whenever she may pay my cottage a visit.

The amusement consists in a concerto of cats: these cats are selected of different ages and sizes, and various intonations of voice; they are ranged in a row, as musicians are in an orchestra. The tougher tom-cats form the bass--the old female tabbies an octave above it, and the tenor and treble are agreeably made up by adult mewers, and some plaintively shrill kittens.

In order that there should be no restlessness in this feline choir, their bodies are fixed stationary by a frame of wood, something like that in which Logier's system confines the knuckles of juvenile performers on the piano-forte. Then the tails of my vocalists are stretched out straight behind them, through

narrow tubes, narrow enough to prevent the possibility of their being moved about: the tip only of the tail, to about an inch and a half in length, is suffered to be exposed.*

Well, when I want to awaken a note from any feline key, Patty, who stands behind, ready for the purpose, gives a nip to the tail of either a bass, treble, or tenor cat, as I direct her. The application of her nails excites a squall from the animal whose tail undergoes the discipline: instantly she withdraws her nails from that particular cat and applies them to the tail of the next cat, and then to the next and the next, and so on, in regular rotation; or, as I direct her, from the top to the bottom of the whole scale, at one shift: sometimes she nips bass and treble at once, with both hands.

It will be pretty plain that after one cat has been set squalling, it will not cease at the moment the next cat begins to caterwaul, (by which, confusion of sound would be produced


* Miss Mirabelle's instrument is an improvement of one of the same feline description, that was actually exhibited in a provincial town about thirty years ago.—*Ed.*

instead of harmony) unless some timely remedy were applied. This is most happily managed by my second fiddle, Tom,—(Patty is first fiddle, and I am conductor)—who, the moment a cat has emitted its legitimate note, or squall, bobs her head down sounce into a trough of milk, which is placed under the noses of the vocalists. Tom has full employment in scampering up and down to stop the mouths of the choir, and so adroit have both he and Patty become, that really my musical recreation may vie in harmony with almost any that can be produced from other instruments, whether live or wooden.

If people are disinclined to credit that harmony can be produced from such a performance as this—they are mistaken. Discord itself can be reduced to harmony; witness the discordant clanging of the Hindoo music, which is to the souls of the natives, the most perfect and exquisite harmony. It does not follow, because the sounds themselves, *by* and in themselves are inharmonious, that they cannot be rendered perfectly harmonious by the adaptation of a

scale of *such* several sounds, which by being reduced to regular *order*, are hence, blended into harmony.

However, experiment will afford the best test to all who may waver in their belief of the harmony of my cat choir. I can assure them that if it is true that ‘a cat may look at a king,’ it is no less so, that this concert of cats is fit even to regale a king withal; and if the account of this novel musical recreation of mine should reach kingly ears, who can tell but that Miss Clorinda Mirabelle may one day be able to flatter herself, that it has, through her humble recommendation, become fashionable at Windsor?



CHAPTER V.

AN ADDITION TO THE "NEIGHBOURHOOD."

THE NEW ARRIVAL.

UNDERSTANDING from Patty one morning while at breakfast, that there was a new comer just arrived at the village, I was of course in an immediate fidget to know who "the new arrival" might be, and was glad to get breakfast over as quickly as I could, in order to set out upon this important discovery.

Who was the most likely person in the village to inform me? When did the "new arrival" come? Late the preceding night, or early that morning? What were his circumstances, or station? What family had he? How old was he? What was his name? Whereabouts had he established himself? How long was he

going to stay? All these topics of inquiry combined to excite my curiosity, and my impatience to set off on my commission. Mrs. Sawnley seemed as likely a person as any one to gratify me in the fullest manner relative to all these particulars; and, therefore, to the parsonage-house I directed my course, determined, the moment I had learned something of the history of the new comer, to pay him a visit.

But the object for which I was about to search, with all this roundabout inquiry, was thrown in my way by chance, before I had passed half through the village. The square clumsy figure of some person to whom I was not used, dressed in a brown coat, kerseymere small-clothes, and long gaiters of the same quality, fully bespoke that the object of my curiosity was before me. Nothing could satisfy me but to walk up at once and introduce myself to the new comer, whoever he might be. Accordingly, I sidled along close up to him, and staring him in the face with a most assured scrutiny, thus accosted him: "I beg your

pardon, Sir, but I rather think I had the pleasure of knowing you once, though it is so long now, since we met, that I cannot recollect the name—was it not . . . ? Dear me, it has quite escaped me !”

The gentleman turned his head round, and looking not over-engagingly at me, answered in a dry tone, “ Upon my word, Madam, I think you are mistaken : *non constat* that I am the person you once knew. I don’t remember ever having seen *you* before; though, to be sure, you may have seen *me*, as a good many persons have of whom I know nothing.”

“ Oh dear ! I recollect now,” I exclaimed, (as indeed I did) “ you are the gentleman whose advice I once came to ask in Lincoln’s Inn—Mr. Quibble, I think ?—You remember a lady calling on you once in your chambers, some years ago, I dare say ?”

“ How ! how ! What *you* are that lady, are you, that played me so unworthy a trick once on a time ; though indeed some years ago, now ?” (I turned my head away with a bashfulness that was certainly very engaging, and smiled)—

“ I have not forgotten you, Madam, now that a circumstance, which gives me cause for recollecting you, is mentioned.”

“ Oh, Mr. Quibble ! you ought surely to have forgotten that which was merely a girlish frolic, and surely not ill-naturedly meant.— Pray, Sir, might I ask, are you come to reside in this village for any time ?”

“ Why, Madam, I cannot exactly say. I am inclined to think”

“ What ! Mr. Quibble ?”

“ — That I doubt, Madam.” *

This curious lawyer-like reply, rather puzzled me, as to what I should next say, in order to elicit any thing like information from Mr. Quibble, as to his intentions about residing in the country : however I recommenced the attack by shifting the ground of my inquiry.

“ Pray have you any family, Mr. Quibble ? A delightfully healthy spot this, which you have chosen, if you have !”

* This will be recognised as a joke of the Hon. Charles Yorke, in order to obtain a higher fee than was offered him, for an opinion.

“ No, Ma'am, I have no family, *barring* Mrs. Quibble; and now are you very much wiser than you were before?”

“ Oh ! I don't wish to ask any thing that may be in the slightest degree disagreeable ; but it is but proper and neighbourly to show interest about a new comer—besides, being an old acquaintance, you know, Mr. Quibble—one cannot help making these little inquiries. I shall be so happy to see Mrs. Quibble.”

“ Well, Madam,” said the lawyer, somewhat relenting, “ Mrs. Quibble and myself shall be glad to see you in a day or two, when we are a little more settled, but at present we are rather in confusion, recently arrived as we are.”

“ Oh dear !” I said, “ it is always a pleasure to me to see my friends under *any* circumstances—as for confusion, there is to me ever an interest about it, that is beyond measure agreeable.”

“ And to me, Mrs. Mirabelle, it is beyond measure *disagreeable*—*disagreeable* enough by itself, without any interferences to make it worse.”

I regarded not this strong hint to me that

I should be in the way just at present, if I called at his house, but turned it off, by catching at a word that had dropped from him.—

“ *Mrs. Mirabelle*, I think you said, *Mr. Quibble*?—not *Mrs.*” I said, smiling, “ but *Miss*: I hope indeed soon to be *Mrs.*—but not *Mrs. Mirabelle.*”

“ Why it is a wonder you are not *Mrs.* something or other, already, I think ! How have you managed this, when you have had so many opportunities of changing your name long ago ?”

“ Fidelity to an object once very dear to me, *Mr. Quibble*; for which I hope soon to be rewarded.”

“ Well, Madam, I wish you joy ! When I called you *Mrs. Mirabelle* just now, I thought it indeed likely I might be mistaken as to the surname. That you were *Mrs.* something or other, I was almost sure ; though uncertain, whether you were *feme covert*, or left to enjoy your thirds by the death of your baron.”

[That ladies may not be shocked at this bad French, it should be observed that *Quibble* uses law French.]

“ I do not exactly comprehend the term ‘*feme covert*,’ nor do I know to whom you allude exactly by the baron. I could mention a good many barons of my acquaintance ; and in particular a certain German,—the Baron Von Blösterbomb.”

“ Poor stupid creature !” said the lawyer aside, “ does not understand the meaning of ‘ baron and *feme*,’ as used for man and wife !* —Well, Madam, and when are you to make yourself *Mrs.* . . . whatever it may be ?”

“ Soon, Sir, I trust, if my lover prove not inconstant,” I replied sighing.

“ If he *does*, let me recommend you to bring an action against him for breach of promise:—but have you his promise in *writing*, eh ?”

“ I have by me a youthful effusion of love, that breathes, with the most ardent tenderness, a hope that I may never be the wife of any other than the writer.”

* Miss Mirabelle’s brother had not enlightened her, it seems, upon this point.—*Ed.*

“ Oh, come, that may be certainly ‘ *construed*’ into a promise,—by *implication*, most assuredly. But you say *youthful* effusion—pray how *long* ago was it sent you ?”

“ Not so very long—say about thirty years ago !”

“ About thirty years ago !” exclaimed Quibble, laughing, “ Lord ! the time for bringing your action then has slipped by rather too long, Ma’am !”

“ What ! could I not find redress in the laws of the land, pray, were I to be outraged enough to require it by the infidelity of my lover ? (whom, indeed, I not long ago threatened with some such alternative, if he should not carry his promise into execution.)”

“ God bless you, Miss Mirabelle, no !” said the lawyer, still laughing, “ vide Stat. 21 Jac. 1. ch. 16, commonly called of Limitations.”

“ Well !” I rejoined, tossing my head up, as I usually do when rebuked, “ I have little reason, I hope, to be under any apprehensions. Mr. Conroy is, I should trust, too much of a gentleman. And now, Mr. Quibble, you

must allow me to ask you whereabouts in the village, you and Mrs. Quibble have established yourselves !”

“ Not far off, Madam ; close to the parsonage-house, round the corner, in the great old white cottage.”

“ What, in the old mad-woman’s house ? Oh, Mr. Quibble, I would not live in that house for the world !”

“ Why, what is the harm of the house, pray ?”

“ Oh, there ’s such a story !”

“ Well, what may it be ?—let us hear it ? About ghosts and goblins, I suppose ?”

“ Why, yes—something of that sort. It is *said* that the person who is the proprietor of it, Miss Jimcray, is mad—and that she became so for love :—and the story *is*, that her parents being averse to the object of her affections, withheld their consent from the match, upon which the young couple were desperately bent. Well ! her lover put an end to himself ; and it is *said*, that ever since that event, the strangest noises in the world have been heard in the

room where he used to pay court to Miss Jimcray ! She, poor girl ! was driven out of her mind at his fatal disaster ; and the story goes, that she has been so ever since, up to this day, while the house itself, has had the reputation of being haunted, and” I was going on ventilating more rigmarole upon this mysterious subject, when Mr. Quibble interrupted me.

“ Pooch !” cried he, “ who set this nonsense afloat ? Lord, Madam, if this *really* had been a ghost story, I am not afraid of ghosts—they do not trouble us lawyers much :—but it has nothing to do with ghosts. It was anything but love, that drove Miss Jimcray out of her mind !”

“ Any thing but love ! And pray what was it, then ?”

“ Why, something a good deal more like a Chancery suit, than love. The poor woman’s head has been ‘ in Chancery ’ these twenty years ; and it is no great wonder that it should have been robbed of its senses by this time.”

“ So it was not love that drove Miss Jimcray out of her senses, then ! And pray, Mr. Quibble, how do you know this ?”

“ This Miss Jimcray was for many years a poor client of mine, and I am now living in her house rent-free ; the last professional duty that I performed, either for her, or any one else, was that of petitioning that a Commission of Lunacy might be granted by the Court, for her care and protection.”

“ Dear, dear ! Well I had always thought she had gone mad, when quite a girl, for love !”

“ No such thing ! Believe me it was the Chancery suit, and nothing else, that, after tormenting her for so many years, accomplished that result for her, and has also left her without a penny to pay me or any one else.”

“ Well ! I am so sorry she is left thus destitute and in your debt ; for I should have had *such* curiosity to know what a crazy person like herself, would have asked for rent of a house !”

“ Indeed, Ma’am ! Well, now, I have no such curiosity ! But, here we are before the house ; and, upon my word ! I recommend you, Miss Mirabelle, to look in, some other day—we have really not yet put any thing in order.”

I did not take much notice of the remark the lawyer was then making, but was thinking of

the blessing of living in a house ‘rent free :’ and this led to conjectures as to what Mr. Quibble had made by his profession ; and my curiosity was again too much excited to allow me to leave the ‘new arrival’ till I had made an attempt at learning something more from him.

“ Rent free ! ” I exclaimed, looking at the house ; “ upon my word, Mr. Quibble, you are well off, to be in so nice a house as this for nothing ! Miss Jimcray must have been tolerably deeply in your debt, I fancy ? That profession of yours must bring you in pretty pickings ? ”

“ Pretty pickings, say you ? Why, after the best part of one’s life has been spent in toiling, it does perhaps bring one something—but the pickings are very hardly earned, I promise you, Miss Mirabelle : and it is not every body in the profession that comes in for a share of them.”

“ Well ! those that *do* have no cause to complain, it should seem :—now, about what, Mr. Quibble, might *you*, for example, have managed to get out of it ?—about, we’ll say”

“ We'll *not* say—if you please, Miss Mirabelle,—*any* thing *about* it: I have given over expounding professional questions, and you must excuse my answering this—besides, I have never been in the habit of answering any question without a fee, and as I don't take fees now, I have left off answering questions.”

“ Oh ! I would not have asked any thing about the matter, if I had fancied you had rather not have answered the question—but *I* conceived that it would be rather a pleasure to you, reflecting on the amount of your professional emoluments.”

“ There are some reflections, Madam, which men think proper not to express ; and this, I fancy, is one of them ; nor do I see exactly how it can matter to you to know what my professional labours have brought me.”

“ Dear, dear ! well, I'm sure—do not suppose I am inquisitive, Sir !—you were good enough to inform me of one or two little things, just now ; and I fancied there could be no harm in asking one or two little things *more*. I'm sure I shall trouble you with no more remarks, Mr. Quibble : so do not be afraid.”

“ There is such a thing, Miss Mirabelle, as going too far—as asking too much :—you must excuse me if I say, that when questioning reaches this point, it becomes unworthy of receiving any answer,—as it assumes the character of impertinence.”

“ Impertinence, Sir ! dear me, I flatter myself I know better than to be guilty of any thing of this sort !”

“ You must not be offended, Miss Mirabelle, at my blunt, lawyer-like way, but it is habitual to me, and I cannot forbear speaking my mind on occasions, in a manner that may appear rather strong.”

As this somewhat warm colloquy ended, we had arrived at the house door. I was strongly inclined to be offended at the lawyer's bluntness, and to have walked away : but the curiosity I felt to see what sort of a person Mrs. Quibble might be, and also what kind of a house the old pair were lodged in, so much prevailed, that I refrained from giving way to my displeasure. Besides, I felt that I was punishing Mr. Quibble in coming into his house before he had set

it in order ; and the indulgence of a little malice made me amends for the pique occasioned me by the lawyer's rudeness of speech.

So I walked with Mr. Quibble into his house. If my curiosity met with repulses from the stiffness of the lawyer, it was now, altogether, unimpowered to exercise itself upon such faculties as belonged to his wife. The obstacles that Mrs. Quibble offered to its gratification, were those both of blindness and deafness : the last of which rendered the putting any questions to her a perfect penance ; and the first, when at length she had been made to hear a question or two, incapacitated her, of course, from giving any solution of them, if they at all depended on observation.

This accounted for the sort of satisfaction with which the lawyer, when he had ushered me into the room where Mrs. Quibble was sitting, left me ; drily remarking at the same time, “ There, I leave you, Miss Mirabelle, to talk with Mrs. Quibble.”

The worry into which this sadly incapacitated old lady threw me, soon rendered me

tired of her company, and I was obliged to take my leave in the most distressing condition of ungratified inquisitiveness that it is possible to imagine. I went away from the house just as wise as I had entered it, ignorant alike of the income, the establishment, and the plans of the new comers. I was half ready to cry with vexation. I went back to my cottage with a hurried step and a peevish countenance, and gave a vent to my dissatisfaction by scolding Puggy, Tom, the gardener, my cook, and also Patty, into the bargain.

[N. B. No one seems to get any thing by meddling with lawyers, but discontent, dissatisfaction, and disappointment.]

CHAPTER VI.

A BREAK IN THE MONOTONY OF VILLAGE LIFE
BY A MOST AGREEABLE SURPRISE.—DEVE-
LOPEMENT OF A MYSTERY.

To make me some amends for the chagrin which I have just described myself as experiencing, a letter was brought me the next morning at breakfast, which I knew at once, from the hand-writing, to be from my friend, Lady Kate. This no less surprised than delighted me. I hastened to open it, when I was gratified by a still farther surprise and a new cause of delight. The letter was as follows:—

“ My dear Clorinda,

“ I intend doing myself the pleasure of paying you a visit on Thursday, in company with

my husband: who that personage may be, I would not tell you for the world, beforehand; but shall keep the secret until it is explained by introducing him to you in person. I shall, therefore, still sign myself

“Your most affectionate,

“KATHARINE RATLINGTON.”

“So this was the object of her running away from me so cunningly: to be married! Well! I wish it had been in *my* power to have practised such an agreeable deceit upon *her*. Perhaps my turn may come soon. Let me see, she is three years younger than I am. Well, I am glad, too, for Kate; but if it had been any other cotemporary, I should not have been glad at all.*. . . . And who can her husband be, I should like to know? I die to learn this—who *can* it be!—that whimsical creature, whom can *she* have married—and what could have put it into her head, after all, to *marry*?

* The feeling in Miss Mirabelle's breast is jealousy, not envy. Scholars will recollect the Aristotelian distinction between the two sensations.—*Ed.*

Well, I shall know all on Thursday Thursday ? why, that's to-morrow !”

I instantly rung the bell for Patty, and told her that I expected a visit from some friends the very next day, and bade her set about putting the rooms in order for their reception : my mind was full of the pleasure I expected in again seeing my friend, and in the novel situation in which she was to meet me. The break which this event made in the monotony of my country life, was a great pleasure and relief to me ; and what with the bustle of preparation, the excitement of expectation, as well as the exercise of conjecture, I was rendered, for the moment, happy.

The morrow dawned : it was a beautiful and shining morning—a day for a journey. “ Nothing can prevent their coming !” I said. About the middle of the day, a cloud came over the sky, and some rain fell ; I began to be apprehensive that the journey might be prevented, if they were not already on the road ;—but whilst I was still doubting, the sound of wheels grew louder and louder near my cottage,

and I was relieved of all apprehension by the arrival of a carriage at the door.

How my heart beat with expectation and pleasure ! A moment had scarcely passed before my dear Kate entered the room, accompanied by her lord, who followed her steps, and in whose dignified figure as he made his appearance, I beheld the person of—Sir Roger Tag !

It was all that I could do to suppress an exclamation of surprise. If surprise had not been my predominant feeling just at that moment, it would have been almost impossible to have refrained from giving way to a little laughter. However, I behaved myself with the most perfect decorum and composure, and received my guests as a well-bred “ Christian should do.”

Considering the regard that existed between Lady Kate and myself, and my own romantic disposition, it will be expected, perhaps, that our meeting was “ a scene :”—no such thing ! We went through it with surprising fortitude, and I saw that Lady Kate was in one of her merriest and most whimsical humours, as if to

show me, that she was charmed and delighted with her matrimonial bargain.

“ Well, I must congratulate you on your happiness with all my heart,” I said, after our first salutations were over ; “ and you too, Sir Roger—I must, also, compliment you on your choice.”

“ Sir Roger is a man of good taste and discernment ; are you not, Sir Roger ?” said Kate to her husband, in her usual droll way.

“ Miss Mirabelle and yourself overwhelm me with your compliments, I assure you, Katharine ; we shall be very happy as man and wife, I have no doubt.”

“ We are both a couple of odd beings, you know, my dear Sir Roger ; but with our good sense, in spite of our oddities, I am sure the world will say that we go on together admirably.”

“ There is no fear of that,” I said. “ You really could not have made a better choice, Sir Roger : Kate will also make a most excellent ‘ head’ of an establishment, amongst other things, which is a great advantage.”

“ I think she will, Miss Mirabelle, and without my recommendation.”

“ That is very certain, Sir Roger ; nothing delights me so much as the management of every thing about me—to design, order, and direct as I please.”

“ And pray,” I said to Lady Kate, “ where, may I ask, did the happy ceremony take place, which you have kept thus long a mystery, in order to surprise me so ?

“ We were married at the village church near Sir Roger’s place in Derbyshire ; and we are now going down into Wiltshire for a short time, as soon as we have left you.”

“ A most agreeable honeymoon you must have had, no doubt ; and as you know I am inclined to be curious—how was it the affair was originally brought about ?”

“ Why, Sir Roger and myself happened to be partners together at a rubber at Lady Dawlish’s card-party, and we were so much pleased with the good play of each other, in such good-humour with one another,—no less than with ourselves, that I took it into my head to put the

proposal to Sir Roger, and did so ; did I not, Sir Roger ?” Sir Roger bowed assent, and smiled.

“ *You* put the proposal ?” I said, much amused.

“ Yes,” interposed the little Baronet, “ my fair partnor pitied my diffidence, and spared my embarrassment, by making me the captive, rather than the assailant.”

“ Well, and then off you set together to be married, the next morning, I suppose ?”

“ The next morning,” they both replied.

“ But still,” I rejoined, “ you have not told me when this mystery took place ?”

“ Why, the very evening preceding the day on which I quitted you so abruptly.”

“ So, then, you have been married some months, at that rate ?”

“ Yes, Miss Mirabelle,” said Sir Roger ; “ our honeymoon has passed, but we have not quarrelled yet.”

“ No, that is impossible that we should,” said Kate, “ Sir Roger finds me such a pattern of obedience ; especially as he gives me my own way in every thing, like a kind husband as he is.”

Sir Roger smiled at his lady's remark : quiz-zical, odd-looking little figure as he was, still he had good sense and some sterling good qualities about him : so that, if he was not likely to command respect in his exterior, yet there was no fear of his not being able to command it in other respects. And I dare say, no husband behaves more sensibly or reasonably than himself ; and no couple go on together with greater harmony than he and his lady.

When Sir Roger had withdrawn, and I and my friend were left together, I could not help giving some little vent to my inclination towards risibility, in which I was joined by my good-natured friend. “ Well ! I heartily approve of your match, as I dare say you could not have made a better, as to the chance of happiness ; but there is one thing about it that I cannot make up my mind to ! ”

“ What is that ? ” said Kate.

“ Oh, you will easily guess,” I replied ; “ I cannot reconcile myself to your new name.”

“ Nay ; I think it a very pretty, short, precise name, with a good deal of character about it,” said Kate, laughing.

“Wonderfully so, indeed!” I rejoined, with good-humoured irony, “but it is of no use objecting to it.”

“Why, it is as good as Ratlington, surely?” said Kate.

“I am glad you are so pleased with it—for my part, I can bear to call you nothing but by your old name—there is character in *that*, if you please.”

“Well, Tag is a good little fellow, if he has not a good name: nevertheless, do you call me by my old name if you please.”

“And now, pray, what was the reason of your having kept me in suspense about your departure from town? Why could not you have let me know what you were about?”

“Why, I was determined to surprise you, as I have done: and a surprise of an agreeable nature is one of the most charming things in the world. So I determined with myself, that I would not let you know I had been married until I could introduce my husband himself to you.”

“But there is another thing that I am surprised at: how *you*, who always used to mock

at the idea of love or matrimony,—could ever have married at this late period of life?”

“As for love, Clorinda, it would be ridiculous to say that it could bear any part in the marriage of myself and Sir Roger; but I will ascribe it to liking on his part, and whim on my own,—not to mention that I am now less apt to make burlesques of men, and am less satirical than formerly. But I am anxious to know as to yourself—when are you thinking of getting married? I can assure you, although you have, like myself, rejected many good offers, yet you will be glad to rescue yourself from the title and condition of an ‘old maid’ before you die, if a chance of doing so offers itself.”

“That is true enough, my dear Kate,” I replied; “and I heartily wish now, that I had not been so imprudent as to reject all the numerous advantageous offers I have had—but you will be glad to hear, no doubt, that the person for whom I so long preserved myself unmarried, has at length returned to England, and has seen me.”

“And you are looking forward to his marrying you shortly, I hope?”

“Why, I hope so—I think so—nay, I am sure of it. You know well, what a fuss I used to make about Albert Conroy.”

“Ay! fuss enough, indeed!” said Kate, smiling.

“Well! he is *so* changed since his departure from England! I did not know it was the same person.”

“*Changed!* to be sure,” said Kate; “how could you expect to find him otherwise?”

“Yes; but I mean changed in ideas and feelings: he is by no means the generous-minded person he used to be. . . .”

. . . . “And who won your heart as a child—Well! that can’t be helped: men driven out into the world to make fortunes, must lose much of their liberality of disposition, and become narrow-minded, in order to be on a footing with the sordid beings by whom the world is chiefly thronged and influenced: but he will marry you surely, since you considered yourself engaged to him?”

“I say, I hope that he will, and am almost sure he will: he is now waiting to hear of the payment of some arrears of rent before he

comes to a conclusion on the business. (My friend seemed inclined to smile, but checked herself.)

“ And when will you be able to give him an account of your concerns ? Soon, I hope ? ”

“ It is uncertain ; the times being difficult, I fear it may be some little time first.”

“ Oh, never fear ! ” said the good-natured Kate, as seriously as she could ; “ you may be sure your day for marrying is at hand—but now that you have the prospect of it so closely in view, and I have thus whimsically attained the object, suppose we amuse ourselves by looking over the ‘ Album,’ in which are recorded the extravagancies of such a number of our old admirers,—raving and addle-brained as they were.”

The inspiriting, lively manner of my friend put to flight all depression which my hesitation as to my chance of matrimony might occasion ; and I concurred with all the alacrity I was ever wont to feel, in the proposed entertainment. It had now been some time since I had looked into the Album : the charm of looking

it over had been lost, when it was unattended by the presence of my friend, by whom, together with myself, it had been compiled, through many a merry evening of drollery and humorous criticism.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ALBUM, OR CHARACTERISTIC LOVE-
ADDRESSES.

IN this little work, those lovers alone figured, whose characteristic oddities have already been exhibited to the reader. Lady Kate, who—as I have some time ago observed, in speaking of our Album—was an excellent caricature drawer, supplied a figure of the subject of our drollery, at the top of the page, underneath which was a characteristic effusion in rhyme, expressive of the adoration which love had inspired in the distracted suitor's breast. The ludicrous attitude and countenance which her pencil had given to the figures, must be imagined, in order to give effect to the rhapsody that is subjoined.

It was in the course of the evening, when we

were again left by ourselves, that we amused ourselves with the subject of our former entertainment. Before I commence turning over the leaves of the Album, I cannot help remarking that this chapter may be a dangerous one. I mean, if its effect should be that of setting girls ridiculing their admirers. Let the gentlemen, therefore, look to themselves: and the girls, on their parts, had better take care lest their matrimonial interests may be in danger of being sacrificed to their love of ridicule; which is more than probable, should they be convicted or even suspected of such transgression.

The first page presented the earliest and most inveterate of my rejected admirers—Ensign Crone—tearing his hair with one hand, and holding a dagger at a decent distance from his bosom with the other: grinning enough to frighten a keeper of Bedlam, and with one leg sprawling out, in a manner that could not have failed of effect in a melodrame.

“What a figure that Ensign Crone is! What a picture of absurdity!” we both exclaimed, laughing.

“ I always thought him the most frightful creature that ever came teasing me with his nonsense !” I added.

“ Yes, and the most ridiculous !” rejoined Kate ; “ let us see what he says ?”

“ Gracious ! the two first words make me scream.”

“ Well, let us hear the address—read on.”
I began :—

ENSIGN CRONE TO HIS ADORED ONE.

THE LOVE SONG OF GLORY.

BLOOD and thunder be the burden
Of my terror-working song :
See me gird the death-fraught sword on,
Rushing 'mid the warrior throng !
Blood and thunder !

Foes beware ! full half a million
By this one dread arm shall fall ;
Caitiffs ! hear me swear to kill ye on—
Horse, and foot, and scouts, and all !
Blood and thunder !

Blood and thunder ! Lo ! what glory
Crowns me, o'er the gore-stain'd field !
Vain for quarter, dogs ! implore ye
Of a heart to pity steel'd.
Blood and thunder !

Camp, and troop, and panic army,
 Squadrons, files, both left and right,
 Overwhelm'd are swept before my
 More than Patagonian might !
 Blood and thunder

Ask ye, what inspires to glory ?
 Why thus fierce mine eye-balls roll—
 Ajax-like,—great chief of story,
 Giant stature, giant soul ?
 Blood and thunder !

Love ! 'tis Love, distracting, blazing,
 Who, great thunderer Jove ! can mock it ?
 Ransacking, bombarding, rasing,
 Scathing like a Congreve rocket.
 Blood and thunder !

A second Helen fires to battle !
 She, that soon my brow shall wreathe,
 As with trophies home I rattle,
 Glory's tale, and Love's, to breathe.
 Blood and thunder !

She ! the soul-inspiring maiden,
 Glowing with a mutual smart,
 Welcomes me, with triumph laden,
 As the conqueror of her heart !
 Blood and thunder ! !

“ And this is the gentleman that was thrashed by the ‘doctor’ !” said Kate, much entertained at this mock-heroic declaration of the Ensign's passion.

“Yes; by that impudent quack, Bolus!” I observed; “you see he can slash and cut and slay, by his own account, most tremendously.”

“A fine fellow, indeed! I wonder that such a second Cid as this, did not win your heart.”

“Well! which is the next ninny?” I continued.

“The awkward, sanctified loon, Sanctum. I declare this a very good figure of him!” said Kate, holding the book up and looking at the caricature.

“Gracious! what a frightful, gawky creature!”

“A charming lover indeed! The representations of Liston in Mawworm are hardly comparable to this figure; this is such a sly-looking knave, as well as being frightful enough to shame the most hideously grinning mountebank.”

“Listen to the hypocrite’s cant, do! Read it in his voice, Clorinda, yourself.”

“What? thus—

(“To Heav’n is *rais’d* my groaning’s sound . . .”)

“Yes, exactly! go on!”

THE VOICE OF HEZEKIAH SANCTUM'S COM-
PLAINING, UNTO CLORINDA MIRABELLE,
THE WELL-BELOVÉD.

To Heav'n is rais'd my groaning's sound,
As loud as fifty ghosts' :
And hills and plains and rocks around,
I make as deaf as posts.

Why is it, that this piteous voice
My restless sperit pours ?
And with its everlasting noise
The spheres celestial bores ?

Than Sharon's rose that lovelier *one*,
Unpitying mocks my suit ;
Whose voice is sweeter than the tone
Of a ten-stringéd lute.

The scornful maid, should *she* relent,
Then would they cease, my qualms :
My sperit then would *be* content,
Be merry and sing psalms.

But now, no psalms afford delight
That once so pleasant were ;
The day to me is dark as night ;
My only food, despair.

I 'm harass'd even to death's brink,
Like partridge on the mountain ;
My thirsty soul where it may drink,
In vain explores a fountain.

Then, damsel ! hear my murm'rings rise ;
More lov'd than *I* can tell !
Whose smile to me is Paradise ;
As thy disdain is Hell !

“ Very well read ! the stresses laid in the right, canting place ; and just like the man.”

“ Well, turn over the page.”

“ Oh ! here we have the Captain next ; to judge by his stumpy figure and blue-striped sailor's trowsers, with his knowing vulgar turn of the head, and his sea-faring countenance : let us hear what raving he utters ! It is all in his boisterous ‘ free and easy ’ way.”

“ Charming !—do you read it, Kate !”

THE NAVY CAPTAIN TO THE GIRL OF HIS
HEART.

“ Jack Wrench, mayhap, though wrecked at sea,
Yet wrecked in Love he ne'er can be !”

ROARING, rumbling, rattling, raging,
Winds with winds are fierce engaging ;
Foaming billows angry dashing,
Fearful o'er the deck are splashing ;
Shrill the albatross's cry
Pierces through the low'ring sky ;

Lightnings flash and thunders rumble ;

Far the deep's hoarse echoes grumble

Wildly howls the tempest's din—

Shriek of the despairing crew,

“ She's lost ! the vessel's foundering ! ”

Rings their dirge the welkin through

. . . . Yet quails not Wrench ! blow tempests ! rattle

Ye thunders ! billows swell ! and battle

Ye fierce dashing seas on the bark's shatter'd side ;

Your menace and roar I deride !

You may rage as you will,

Since your worst is—to kill.

And stout tar, as I am,

Death I fear not a d—n !

Frown your darkest, then ! frown !

Bid your gulf suck us down.

Cheer'd my soul by its flame,

Life or Death greets the same ;

For you never shall quench

The love's spark of

JACK WRENCH !—R. N.

“ I always used to long to see that Captain ducked in his own briny element—but I declare, I think I should now be foolish enough to marry him to-morrow, were he to present himself with an offer.”

“ What ! such a free and easy, ‘ *jolly*,’ square-‘ *timbered*,’ grog-drinking fellow as that Hope for better things, do ! ”

“ Well, go on, Kate ! turn over—who is the next oddity ? ”

“ The impudent quack, Bolus, I declare ! He has a pill-box in one hand, and is sidling up to me with his other hand behind him, for a fee—a delightful portrait, and like the man ; with a look of brass, though he pretends to look rueful, too.”

“ He was certainly the most impudent fellow I ever remember seeing or hearing of. His strain literally gives me a qualm—listen to it—the first lines are really an emetic.”

“ Well ! never mind—let us hear them ! ”

BULLETIN OF LOVE.

FROM THE AMOROUSLY DISORDERED,

EMPIRICANE BOLUS.

AH me ! what sable dose of senna,
 Of rhubarb, ipecacuanha,—
 Root, grain, or drop, although you try all,
 In lump dealt out, or serv'd from phial—
 So fiercely can the system move,
 So wrack it, as a dose of Love !

I, Bolus, quack-doctor, whose merriment
On patients is to make experiment ;
By which, though now and then I cure,
At killing I am much more sure—
Proceed, the *symptoms* to reveal
Which from that dose of Love I feel.
—To all who read, be this description
As sacred as my best prescription.

All through my frame an agueish twitter
Came on :—and then, by turns, occur'd
A fev'rish, parching heat,—most bitter :
And an inch thick my tongue was furr'd.

My heart, it was in such a momock !
That I my breath could scarcely draw ;
My hands were press'd across my stomach,
And rueful dropp'd my lower jaw !

At first my head, and then my bowels,
I thought disorder'd ; then my liver ;
And then, I cried out for warm towels,
As sudden o'er me came the shiver.

Again, my heat compels to swallow
Draughts of some soothing beverage :
But ptisanes, neither white nor yellow,
Could aught allay its feverish rage.

They gave me calomel:—magnesia
And rhubarb, had been tried in vain,—
But still I felt myself no easier ;
Nay, rather found increas'd the pain.

Next, of *hydrarg* : they administer'd

Gr. X. ter nocte to be taken,

Et omni die : and then blister'd,

A perspiration to awaken.

Worn out by blister, dose, and pill,

I try what strengthening drinks will do ;

Prescribe *oz. iii. de Sarsparill*:

Rad: menec: et guiac: oz. ii.

But still, the blood it feverish burns,

Still throbs the pulse—up at an hundred !

And pale my cheek and flush'd by turns :

My head as if 'twere being sunder'd !

Now swims my sight—and now, there buzzes

A droning, humming, tinkling din,

Like Sappho's—the poetic hussey's—

My wilder'd tympanum within.

Doctors and chemists, one and all,

Cure me these symptoms, if you can !

From all Apothecaries' Hall,

Would you could find me out the man !

Alas ! they mock your skill,—and prove

Too well the source from whence they grew—

The sweet, the treacherous bane, of Love,

Whose cure can spring alone—from *You*—*

MISS CLORINDA MIRABELLE.

* In the last of the above stanzas, these ladies express in jest, what has been so seriously uttered by Ovid, Propertius, Petrarch, and others :—*e: g* :

“ Omnes humanos sanat Medicina dolores,

Solus Amor morbi non amat artificem.”—*Prop.*—ED.

“Admirable ! just like the man ! He is exactly the sort of impertinent person to do a ridiculous thing of this kind in a grave way :—by the by, Kate, have you seen any thing of him since his exposure ?”

“Nothing in the world, and nobody knows what has become of him.”

“And nobody cares—that is perfectly certain,” I rejoined.

“Who comes next ?” said Kate, turning over the leaf.

“Oh ! it is my old friend ‘lawyer’ Quibble—do you know, he is now a neighbour of mine here in the village. I went the other day, hearing that somebody had newly arrived—to see, who he might be, and lo and behold ! it was my worthy lover, Quibble.”

“Is the man married ?”

“Yes ; to a wretched creature who is blind and deaf too, and in whose company I wore out my patience the other day, in trying to extort three words of conversation from her.”

“Well, she is good enough for her musty lord and husband, I dare say. Let us see how

he made love, when he had less of law in him, and, perhaps, more of impudence.”

MR. QUIBBLE TO MISS MIRABELLE.

PLEAS IN THE COURT OF LOVE.*

WHEREAS, Clorinda Mirabelle,
 For wit renown'd, and charms as well,
Femme sole, that is, a spinster sweet,
 Of number 60, ——— street,
 In city fair of Westminster,—
Did come, *one* grievance to refer
 To me, hight Bother'em Quibble, in
 My chambers here at Lincoln's Inn—
 And *whereas*, since she bless'd my sight,
 I, by connubial writ of right,
 Have burn'd with longings warm to claim her,
 And as my dear *femme coverte* name her,—
 She'll pardon me that thus I scribble,
 I, the *aforesaid* Bother'em Quibble.

Imprimis, you, ye *suitors* rival !
 Must I, from her bright presence, drive all—
 Ah ! feign would I, at cart's tail whipt,
 Or in foul pond from tumbrel dipt

* Mr. Quibble pleads in the language of Chancery first of all, and then in that of Law.—*Ed.*

Behold ye ! for the vain pretence,
 ‘ The base, unblushing impudence,’
 With which ye strive, without compunction ;
 To *stay* my *suit* by foul *Injunction*.

But I defy ye all ! and *move*
 This honourable Court of Love,
 That your demands be *set aside*,
Sans costs : and that I take as bride
 The said Clorinda, *spinst’ et ceterá*,
 As ‘ lawful wife,’ for worse or better-á.

Dares any start up to *demur* ?
 Dares any threaten to *refer*
 The cause to private *arbitration*,
 Since worsted in his litigation ?
 Dares any one *put in* his *plea*
 Pretending *prior claim* to me ?
 The impudence that so demands her
 I scarcely condescend to *answer*,
 Too confident your Lordship, Cupid,
 Will ne’er be so—I might say—stupid—
 As not *in toto* to fulfil
 The humble *prayer* of this my *Bill*.

And now, my foes the suit withdraw
 From Chancery of Love, to Law :
 And should I urge, with mild protest,
 The matter should be set at rest,
 Since they *must* own *my case* is best ;
 Cries one, “ You’d better not appear !
 Cast in your suit, ’twill cost you dear !

'Twill little help you, this *imparling*,
 This *interlocutory* snarling ;
 Claiming ' *licentiam loquendi*,'
 Plea upon plea ! 'Too well the end I
 Of your poor ' weakly bolster'd case,'
 Anticipate, and your disgrace !"
 —Then swears, from my pretensions he
 Means to *eject* me presently.

Another, when I praised *her* face
 Vapour'd of " 'Trespass on the Case :"
 Declaring too, he would " exhibit
 Peace articles," me to " prohibit ;"
 Because I vow'd, that *in duello*
 I combat would, the swaggering fellow !

But one and all, I scorn their threats,
Ejectments, trespass, detinets :
 Nor even condescend will I
 To " indict them for conspiracy."
 But give them, and their *actions—civil*
 And *criminal*—unto the Devil.

But pity thou thy Quibble's pain,
 Fair maid ! nor, thus, his suit disdain.
 Would you consent to be his own,
 A " good consideration"
 He offers ; " chattels personal
 And real ;" house, and lands, and all :
Toftos et croftos, et orchardos,
Hedgas et ditchas, courtas, yardos ;
Gardenos, barnas, et pig-stylos,
Et stabulos, et shrubbery'os :

*Granarias, et drying groundas,
Coachstandas, et dove-cottas roundas,
Cowas, et piggos, doggos, cattas,
Ac etiam mousas, atque rattas.**

All these I'll give thee, I declare !
And farther, *bona-fide* swear,
Whene'er thy hand my suit shall bless—
Before " three valid witnesses,"
Will I " the same," " in trust," deliver,
And " settle, on the heirs for ever"
Of those, that " to be born shall be,
Issue " of thy fair self and me,

BOTHER'EM QUIBBLE.

" Truly, a very characteristic effusion !" I observed, as Lady Kate concluded reading the lawyer's address; " if I remember right, my old brother helped us in making this, or we never could have scraped together those legal phrases, I 'm sure !"

" So he did, I remember—what has become of the testy old gentleman, pray ?"

" Oh ! I suppose as testy as ever ; I never hear from him, and imagine that he goes on as usual, moping by himself, or with his house-keeper, Busby, by way of society."

* For specimens of this legal dog-Latin, see Ruggle's *Ignoramus*.—*Ed.*

“ Who knows? *he* may marry one day, when he has heard of my nuptials and your own.”

“ It is not likely, I think : if he does, I recommend him to set about it soon. But what a charming figure you have made of Quibble, Kate !”

“ Yes, he is a charming-looking creature, to be sure ; with his parchments up to his ears, his countenance screwed up with a serious grimace, and frightful wig !”

“ And that little black imp that is squatted like a toad on his shoulder, whispering something in his ear, has great effect. You have managed the whole design well, Kate !”

“ Yes, and look at the miserable, pale-faced, lantern-jawed clerk, too, that attends on him, and is taking a parchment from the table to copy.”

“ Poor wretch ! he looks more deplorable than the lay-brother in the ‘ Duenna !’ ”

“ Well, we have nearly come to the end of our amatory gallery,” said Kate ; “ there is but one more figure and one more effusion.”

“ Who is that ?” I asked.

“ The rhapsodical, ill-behaved portrait painter ; *he* seems inclined to give us rather an Anacreontic effusion.”

“ Yes, these artists are vastly impertinent sometimes, and give themselves great airs, under the idea that they are favourites with the ladies that employ them.”

“ Did the man recover from his disgrace ?”

“ Oh, yes ! and still goes on in his vocation ; but has not risen to any greater eminence than he held when he thought proper to behave towards you with such impertinence. Listen to the varlet’s whining.”

THE ADDRESS OF THE FINE ARTS.

Vidi fra mille donne una già tale,
Ch’ amorosa paura il cor m’ assalse
Mirandola in imagini non false
A gli spirti celesti in vista eguale.

PETRARCH.

WHILE others daub their cheeks with rouge,
Gay dowager and starch duenna,
To veil complexions of gambouge,
And soften hues as brown as senna ;

With red the face, with white the forehead,
 Beplaster :—unavailing art !—
That only makes them look more horrid,
 Than if they cast the daubs apart.

Thou, in thy native radiance beaming,
 More like some vision from above,
Youth's joyous lustre round thee streaming,
 The hues of health, the soul of love,—

Smil'st on us ! . . . every magic wearing
 That grace, that beauty can impart,
—In guise not fairer than endearing,—
 To charm the gaze, and win the heart.

In joy, in grief, sure such the vision
 Could painter's happiest dream control !
Some such inspir'd the trance of Titian ;
 Such, erst could wring Timanthes' soul.*

The rosebud's blush—that bathes the dews in,
 The deepest azure of the sky,—
This, is thy softer cheek suffusing,
 This, gleams reflected in thine eye.

Quit, quit those traits ! 'tis death to linger,
 Artist, no more their beauties trace :—
Or study, now, the lily finger,—
 If, haply, to forget the face.

* Beauty, as in the instance of the Iphigenia of Timanthes, acquires an additional interest and loveliness from its very distress.

In vain ! And mark thine hand, 'tis straying,
Too vaguely on the canvass prest,
Availless all, that form pourtraying,—
Deep pictur'd in thine absent breast !

“ You have hit off *his* figure, too, admirably !
In an affected attitude, in the middle of his
cabinet, hanging in raptures over the miniature
he executed of me. Upon my word, Kate, you
rival Cruickshank !”

.

This was the last time that I have ever
enjoyed the pleasure of looking over my Album
with Kate. She did not stay with me above a day
or two altogether, during which we talked over
all the agreeable scenes we had experienced in
each other's society. Amongst other things
that fell from her, I learnt that Lord Alfred
Gambleford and Sir Jeffrey Simperby had
been at loggerheads about the possession of
Lady Canterly, the vain widow : and that the
dispute had ended in the fop being shot near
Chalk Farm by the Baronet, very much to the
grief and indignation of Lady Canterly, who,

when Sir Jeffrey came to her with his offers, rejected him with disdain and reprobation. The Quizzetts, I understood, were looking forward to great rejoicings: the eldest Miss Quizzett being shortly to marry the redoubted Baron Von Blösterbomb.

The two other sisters also were to be married: the youngest to George Arven, slightly mentioned in my first book; the second to a young nobleman related to the family. As for my partner, Arthur Quizzett, he was thinking of wedding his cousin Arven's sister, eminent for her beauty.

In return for all this interesting intelligence, I had but little to offer my friends, excepting such as related to myself and my new establishment, and mode of life in the country. Yes, one thing I had to offer, and that was a treat which they must with justice have valued, since its occurrence would be rare—it was my feline concert. I regaled Sir Roger and his lady, with

“ Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle !”

in grand style. I need not say that the music met with their entire approbation, and amused them beyond my most sanguine expectations.

Kate did not leave me without again animating me with hope that I should soon change my maiden state and name. She also charged me to let her hear from me, the moment that happy event should take place, and at the same time declared that nothing would satisfy her, but that I should come down into Wiltshire to pass the honey-moon in her house.

I saw their carriage roll off with tears in my eyes:—I am sorry to be pathetic, but I felt my condition at present, in spite of the excitation of gossip, so insipid in comparison with that heyday of life which I had enjoyed in her company, that I could not but give way for the time to a feeling of depression. Still, hope led me again to look forward to days of more animating aspect.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD MAID'S SOLITARY EVENING—
NERVOUS, AND LANGUISHING.

I FELT melancholy in spite of my hopes, for some days after Lady Kate's departure: I could not help contrasting her happiness, or good fortune, with my own condition; and however much I might feel pleased for her sake, I could not but sigh when I thought that I too, myself, had not equal cause to be glad.

What relief gossiping and gadding could afford me, it did: and how much was I inspired, when at the time at which my tenant had promised to pay one half of the arrears, he called, true to his word, and actually paid it!—My eyes could scarcely believe that they saw his greasy country bank notes and sovereigns,

all produced from a dirty sackcloth pouch, and spread out upon the table before me.

This happy event was instantly the signal for writing to Mr. Conroy. I informed him by that very day's post of the good faith of my tenant, and hoped he would now be under no apprehensions about the whole amount of arrears being duly paid.

After I had despatched this letter, I went round to my acquaintance in high glee, and invited the whole 'neighbourhood' to come and drink tea with me, about that day week; by which time I hoped to have received so satisfactory and decisive an answer from Mr. Conroy, that I should be able to impart with confidence to Mrs. Sawnley the eventful intelligence of which she was to receive the first intimation.

But, alas! the invidious fates determined that my tea-party should not be given under such happy and cheering auspices. Scarcely two days had passed from my writing to Mr. Conroy, when I received a communication from him, dated from the house of a broker—an

Israelite, in Change-alley ; in which he told me that he was glad to hear my tenant had paid part of the arrears, and should be farther glad to learn that he had paid the whole amount. Meanwhile, he had so much business on his hands in the city, that he should be unable to come down and see me till I informed him of my next receipts.

“ The shabby, old, good-for-nothing Levite ! ” I exclaimed, on reading his disgraceful communication : “ is this the way in which he banters me, and mocks at my fidelity towards him ? execrable, mean-spirited wretch ! ”

After a good deal of useless fretting, I was obliged to pacify myself as I had already done, by again summoning Hope to my assistance : so by hope did I endeavour to support life, though perchance it might be my doom to lose it through despair.

My evenings were, for the most part, spent by myself,—the quiet “ neighbourhood ” not being anxious to provoke gossiping by asking me too frequently to tea-parties. I shall, therefore, in the interval previous to my own tea-

party, proceed to give a sketch of a solitary evening at my cottage. It will bear a more than usually melancholy cast, in consequence of the bad spirits into which I was suddenly thrown by the receipt of the shabby Conroy's epistle from Change-alley.

I am indeed in a sadly languishing depressed state at this moment. . . . I had been playing a few bars on the piano; quite in the (mock) sentimental mood.

Ah! that is a sweet air—that “John Anderson my Joe;” it throws a languid sensibility over the soul—it excites a painful, yet sweet sensation of sorrowful repose—although it depresses,—yet, it soothes! I'll play it once again—put back the lid of the piano, Patty, that the sounds may wake forth with more fulness on the ear—there, that will do, girl. I think I will accompany the notes with my voice.

“Jo—o—hn” (hem, hem!) “Au—der—son, my Jo—o—oe”
(hem, hem!)

“John An—der—son, my—y—y—y Joe!”

Beautiful!—quite ecstatic—once again:—
(ahem, hem!)

“ Jo—ohn An—der—son, my Jo—o—oe,
John An—der—son, my—y—y—y—Jo—oe.”

How the notes die away on the ear ! Oh, they are quite heavenly ! I can fancy the angels hymning strains like these ! Shut up the piano-forte, Patty—yet no—let it stay open. I may perhaps wish to soothe myself once again with that, or with some other air before the evening is closed . . . Heigh ho !

There is an old English air which was in fashion when I was quite a girl, called “ Heigh ho ! No—ni—no : ” it is the only air that at all comes in competition with that sweet song, “ John Anderson.” I would that I had it ! What a resource this music is to a feeling soul ! Patty, let the tea be made strong this evening, for I feel my spirits in a sad flurry.”

“ Oh ! dear me, Ma’am, tea so strong will make you still more nervouser, I ’m sure.”

“ Then drop a tea-spoonful or two of cordial into it, there ’s a good girl, and that will perhaps have the desired effect : and now, Patty, whilst I rest my legs upon the couch, take down a book from the shelf, and get a chair and sit down

and read to me—(just reach me that salts bottle from the mantelpiece)—it will compose me a little: I am very languid and out of spirits this evening.”

I considered that Patty was on the whole a decently educated girl for her station—that is to say, she could read—yes, and pretty well too; and write, and had a decent head for accounts. She went to the shelf—

“What book should you like me to read from, this evening, Ma’am?”

“Mention what books there are.”

“Here is the ‘Moonlight Terrace, or Rabonti, the Bandit Bravado of Salerno.’”

“Well, child, not that.”

“Then here is ‘Lullaby, or The Liquid Slumber,’ by Miss Anna Matilda Scraggs, author of ‘The Despairing Lovers,’ ‘The Haunted Tower of the Black Ravine,’ ‘Rodmond, the Mysterious Monk,’ and ‘The Bloody Stiletto.’”

“No! none of those: I have read them all since I have been here, over and over again—for want of something better: let me hear something else.”

“ ‘ Hell Broth, or the Black Goblin’s Howl in the Hartz Forest,’ ‘ Fugitive Pieces, or Amatory Wanderings in the Groves of Ravenna,’ by Laura Sospira.”

“ No ! no ! ”

“ ‘ The Deathbolt ! or Dunderdum Dowdracken, the Dutch Dram-drinker,’ by Thomaso Infaustulo.”

“ No, no ! something else.”

“ ‘ Fairy Land, or the Princess of Budrud-Badrout—gol—’ ” . . .

(“ ‘ Badroulgomalia,’ you mean :—well ! ”)

“ ‘ The Enchanted Griffin,’ ‘ The Persian and Turkish Tales,’ ‘ The Monk,’ ‘ The Mysteries of Udolpho,’ ‘ The Pricked Thumb, or Advice to Ladies Embroidering,’ ‘ The Common Prayer Book,’ ‘ Amelia,’ ‘ Tom Jones,’ ‘ The Duty of Woman,’ ‘ Cookery, by a Lady,’ ‘ Warnings against Jealousy, Addressed to Husbands,’ ‘ The Gi—a—’ ”

(“ ‘ The Giaour ! ’ child—well ! ”)

“ ‘ Description of the Tallow Pot Tree ! ’ ”

“ The *what* tree ? ”

“The Tallow Pot, Ma’am.”

“The *Talipot* tree, you mean: it is a tree that grows in the islands of the Indian Ocean—a very amusing old book too, that is:—go on!”

“‘Bolus, on the Female System.’”

“That impudent fellow’s book! No, not that.”

“‘La *novle*—I can’t read the name of this book, Ma’am—”

“‘La Nouvelle Héloïse,’ I suppose,—well!”

“‘The Mother’s Guide in the Education of’”

(“Ah! would *I* had need of it!”)

“‘Sacred Dreams,’ ‘The Vampire,’ ‘Congreve’s Plays,’ ‘Bible,’ ‘Pamela,’ ‘Ovid’s Art of Love,’ ‘Clarissa,’ ‘The Gay Deceiver.’”

“That will do, Patty. You have looked over a sufficient number; take out that last book, and read a page or two of it—turn to the second chapter of the third volume—now.”

Patty thus read:—

“‘*Sweet Seraphina exclaimed Rinaldo clasping his mistress’s hand in both his own looking*

first upon her then upon the ground as if dazzled by her resplendent charms sweet Seraphina—’”

“ Oh ! you don’t mind your stops ! you read too fast—I can’t understand you—slower, if you please—begin again.”

“ ‘ Sweet—Sera—phina—exclai—med Ri—nal—do—’ ”

“ That is too slow.”

“ ‘ Sweet—(hem !)—sweet—(ahem !)—sweet Seraphina, exclaimed—exclaimed’ ”—

“ Don’t boggle and haggle, and repeat so, there’s a good girl ; this is worse than before : really, Patty, I thought you could read better.”

“ I’m afraid, Ma’am, I can’t *hardly* read to please *you* ; I’ve not been used to read any thing but *what* old Mrs. Bobbin used to give me ‘ to do,’ at school.”

“ Well, put up the book, child ; bring the tea-things, and then make tea : mind you make it strong, and put in that which I told you—I shall endeavour to get a few moments’ re-e-pose here on the couch—dear ! how my voice does tremble, to be sure.”

While Patty is making tea, I am endea-

vouring to doze, but in vain—my head-ache will not allow me; so I get up from my reclining posture, and sit and read from one of the interesting volumes, the titles of which have been just named by my maid. The subject of my present perusal being the delightful work, in attempting to read a passage from which Patty was so unsuccessful.

“Patty,” I said, laying down “The Gay Deceiver” on the table; “I am tired of the books I have; and therefore sent, as you remember, for a box of books from Town: has Tom yet been down to the village to see if the coach from London has left them yet?”

“Yes, Ma’am, he has; and he says the box has not been left this evening.”

“Provoking and tiresome!—pug, don’t bark so!—hush! I insist on it this moment. Patty, don’t let them teaze the cat. See, they are fighting—stop, puggy!—pussy, get along with you!”

“She deserves a little trimming, Ma’am, for what she has been doing to-day.”

“Why, what is that?”

“ I’m afraid to tell you, Ma’am ; you will be so angry when you hear it—why she eat up the goldfish, every one of them, this afternoon.”

“ She did ! the vile creature ! hah ! get out of the way, nasty thing ! At her, puggy !—how did she get at them, Patty ?—turn her out of the room.”

“ Why, she jumped upon the window-ledge from the staircase, and clawed down the glass vase with her paws, and then——”

“ She murdered the fish, the vile creature !—fly at her, puggy ! Oh ! gracious ! stop that barking—turn them both out of the room.—Heavens ! what a noise ! there !—thank Goodness—they are out of the way ! Well, now Patty give me a little tea—most provoking thing, losing those gold fish—never let me see that cat again ; and mind, the next time she performs in concert, to pinch her harder than any of the others—vile creature !”

“ Do you find the tea to your liking, Ma’am ?”

“ Yes ! it will do very well : I think that the little cordial you put into it will do me good—I have a slight heart-burn too.”

“ Will the cordial do *that* good, Ma’am ?”

“ Yes, child, the finest thing in the world for it ! Undo my stays, Patty—I feel so much oppressed—something I am sure must have disagreed with me—I have not felt well the whole day :—there, that will do, Patty—the stays are loosened enough now.”

“ You feel yourself more comfortabler now, Ma’am, I hope ?”

“ Yes, I thank you, child, that will do—give me a little more tea—provoking, they have not sent the books—and that abominable cat !”

“ A little more tea, Ma’am ?”

“ Yes, you may pour out a little more : you have made it very well, Patty. There that will do—and now you may go up stairs, and get my room ready, and see that the fire is lighted. I shall go to bed very early to-night, for what with the noise of that dog’s barking and my low spirits, I am in such a state of nervousness, I am only fit to be in bed.”

Left again to myself, my melancholy thickens again upon me—“ My soul is overwhelmed

with regret," I exclaimed, getting up and walking towards the piano: "Alas! once, my solitary hours were beguiled with soft recollections of Love awakened in my heart's fond dream but now, what a sad reality pours its cloud over the pensive hour of reverie! 'Albert Conroy! Albert Conroy! Why art thou not the same,' my tender bosom asks, 'which thou wert wont to be?—the same to me as I could in tenderness be to thee? yes, as I *could* be, if thou would'st permit me?' Yet one sweet air before I retire to repose—one short, yet plaintive ditty, expressive of that pathetic dirge which thy unkindness, Albert, may, perchance, occasion to be mournfully hymned over the breathless remains of thy cruelly treated Clorinda!"

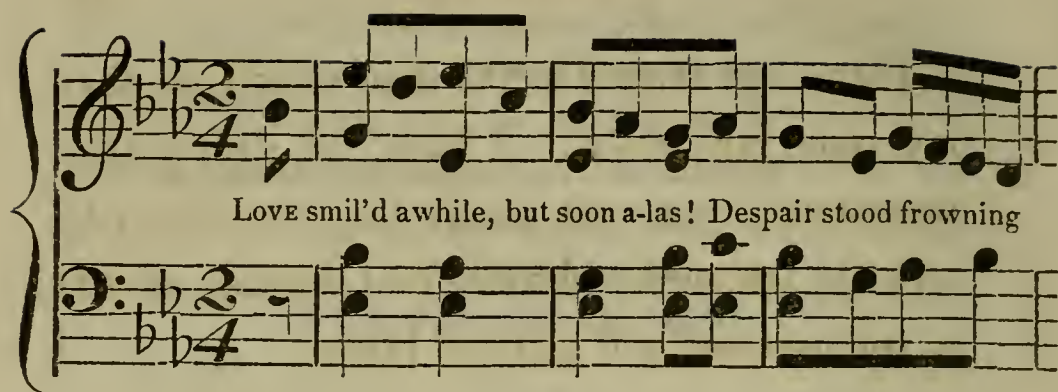
Putting a handkerchief to my eyes to wipe away the moisture which this excess of feeling had brought into them, I sat down to the instrument, and played the following sweet little melody, accompanying it with trembling and plaintive accents:—

“ Love smil’d awhile, but soon, alas !
Despair stood frow-ow-ning near—
At fifty-five cut down like grass,
Sweet maid ! she died one Michaelmas,—
And hol-ly-hocks
And hol-ly-hocks
Bedeck the vir-ir-gin’s bi-er !”

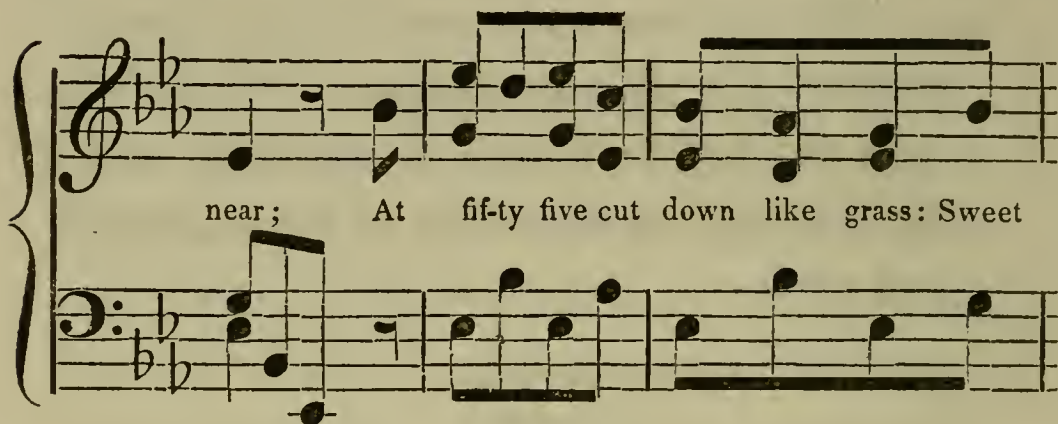
The tears once again came into my eyes as I repeated the plaintive burden of this melody, with renewed tenderness of quavering, and a more interesting alternation of grunt, squeak, and croak—

“ And hol-ly-hocks
And hol-ly-hocks
Be-deck the vir-ir-gin’s bi-er !”

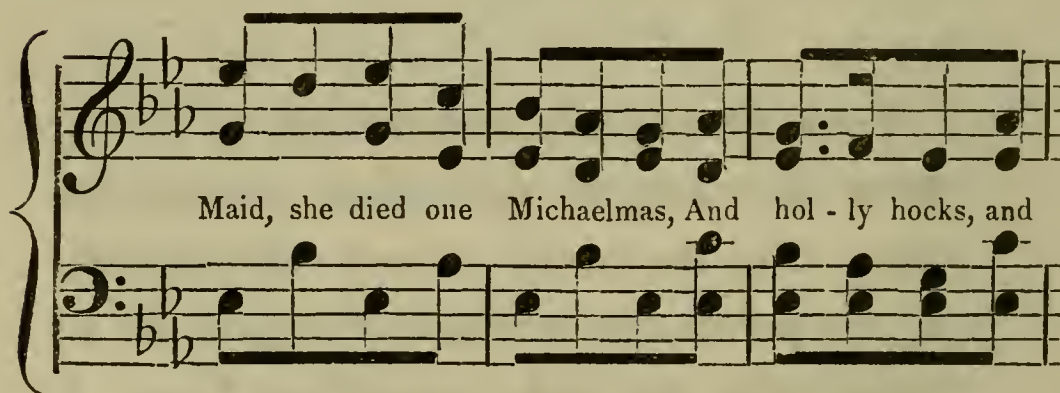
I can scarcely suppress the tear as I write down the words of this artless and pathetic ditty. For the benefit of such sentimentalists as may peruse this memorial, I subjoin the air belonging to the words just written down. It should be played in slow, impressive time, to give it effect ; some persons may possibly pronounce it hideous, but to the sentimentalist, in a nervous mood, it will be perfect delight.



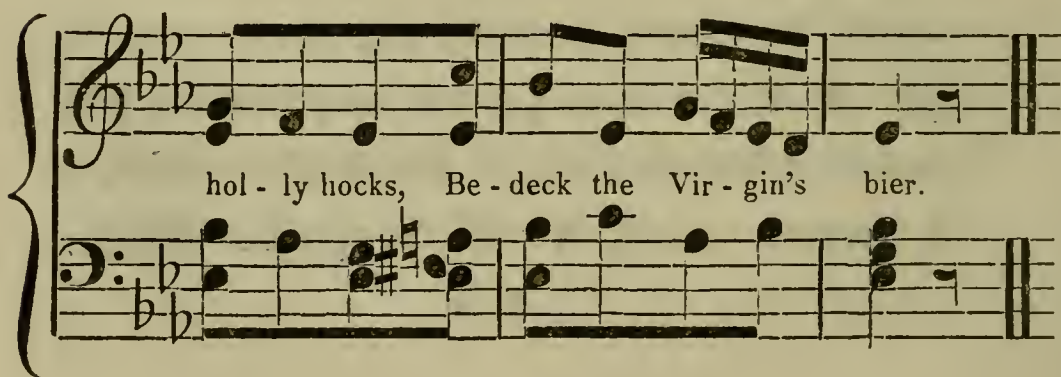
Love smil'd awhile, but soon a-las! Despair stood frowning



near; At fif-ty five cut down like grass: Sweet



Maid, she died one Michaelmas, And hol - ly hocks, and



hol - ly hocks, Be - deck the Vir - gin's bier.

Patty now tapped at the door to tell me that my room was ready. I bade her shut up the instrument, and went slowly and sorrowfully to seek the temporary oblivion that slumber affords to the harassed and agitated bosom.

CHAPTER IX.

“THE NEIGHBOURHOOD” ENTERTAINED AT TEA
BY MISS MIRABELLE.

I HAD managed to regain somewhat of my good spirits, by the arrival of the day, the evening of which was to witness my village friends at my tea-table. The morning was occupied in discussing with my maid the fidgety preliminaries to the afternoon’s slip-slop festivities.

“Patty, is the green *chainy* set, all quite complete? Are you quite sure none of the cups and saucers are broken or missing?”

“Quite sure, Ma’am, for I have counted them all.”

“Are you certain now, that the large blue dish for the cake is not chipped at the edges—

you know there is so much carelessness practised with respect to these articles, that one cannot be too particular in one's inquiries."

"Oh dear me!—why now—"

"Well, and what *now*—Patty?"

"Why I declare, Ma'am, if there is not a little chip!" said she, taking the dish in question from the shelf in the cupboard which contained it—"here it is—there is only a bit of gilding rubbed off after all, just on the rim."

"There could not be a worse dis-sight. It is very provoking that the things are so chipped and knocked to pieces!"

"Don't you think, Ma'am, that if you were to gum a little morsel of yellow riband over the chipped place, nobody would miss the gilding?"

"Silly creature! that would be making bad worse—put the dish up in its place—and now let me see the green set?"

"Here it is, Ma'am," said Patty, taking down two or three of the cups and saucers.

"Why, how can you say, Patty, that the set is all as it should be? The very first thing that

I see on looking at it, is, that one of the cups is without a handle."

"Without *ever* a handle! Why I declare, so there is one without *ever* a handle! Well, I'm sure *I* don't know *who* broke it off, *that* I don't."

"No, of course you do not! when any mischief is done of any sort, to *any* article of furniture in the house, 'Nobody' is sure to be the person who has been guilty of it. *Always, always*, it is *nobody's* fault. The whole set is spoilt, you know—very vexatious indeed!"

"Pray, Ma'am, is there *much company* coming this evening?—because, if there is not, you will not want the whole set out, perhaps?"

"That may be true, Patty; but still it is very vexatious to have the things chipped and dubbed in this manner. I beg that more care may be taken in putting them up and taking them down in future!"

"I am sure that *I* always take the greatest care, whenever I meddle with them, whatever *Mrs. cook* may do."

“ Well, you must have the tea-things set out at about half past seven ; there will be Mr. and Mrs. Sawnley, and Mrs. Quibble, and perhaps Mr. Quibble—I am not certain;—then there will be Mrs. Sparks and her two daughters, for I do not much expect Mr. Sparks, confined as he is by his gout. We shall walk about the garden for a short time, and then come in to tea.”

“ Very well, Ma’am ; that will be seven then in all, counting yourself, and leaving out Mr. Quibble and the Squire,” answered Patty, after a calculation on her fingers.

“ And inquire of the cook whether the bread-cake is baked or not. Poor Mr. Sawnley will be at a loss what to do without one—and ask, too, if the tea-cakes are being made ? By-the-by, tell Tom to be in readiness with the basket directly, as I must go down to the village, to Mrs. Lofpane’s the confectioner, and pick out a pound-cake, or the Misses Sparks will be quite put out of their way.”

Patty went off to summon Tom to his post, .

while I screamed after her, to make haste, since it was past two o'clock, and that there was no time to be lost. I set out almost immediately to Mrs. Lofpane's, in great anxiety lest I might not find what I wanted.

For once in a way I was not disappointed: this was a wonder, for, generally speaking, we are always sure to be disappointed when it is most in our wishes or to our interests that we should not be so. Such is (as I have before observed in a pet) the law of contrarieties that exists in the dispensation of all things human. People may perhaps think that it is a matter of no great importance, if I *had* been disappointed in procuring the cake I wanted; they are wrong—it was to me a matter of the first importance for the success of my party that evening, that I should be provided with one.

I was not only fortunate enough to procure the cake I wanted, but had my choice of five or six very tempting-looking pound-cakes; besides two or three plum-cakes of a small size.

“What could be the reason,” thought I, “of Mrs. Lofpane’s having such an unusual number? There could be no tea-parties, surely, in the village, that evening, but my own?” I bought one of the plum, and one of the pound-cakes, and having deposited my purchase in Tom’s basket, trudged back home.

The interval between that of my return to my cottage and the arrival of my guests, was chiefly occupied in giving my gardener directions to trim the walks, and have them well swept, as I expected that my guests would give me as much of their company without, as within doors. There are few things, indeed, which are regarded with more jealousy by village ladies than the progress and condition of their neighbours’ gardens: they are for ever making comparisons between their own geraniums and myrtles, violets, sweet-peas, and even cabbages, and those of their acquaintance.

The tea-things were now set out in the drawing-room, which afforded an access through a

window-door to the garden. The door opened upon a lawn, and all such of my flowers as were in pots, were arranged in their glory on each side of the window. I was engaged in arranging some flowers which I had picked from these in a large China bowl on the side table, when Mr. and Mrs. Sawnley arrived.

“ I thought,” I said to myself, as they were announced, “ that these Sawnleys would come before any one else.—How do you do, Mrs. Sawnley? I’m delighted to see you in such good time.”

“ I fear, my *dear* Miss Mirabelle, that we have come a little too soon, perhaps?”

“ Oh, no! indeed,” I answered, “ not at all too soon.”

“ It *harises*,” added Mr. Sawnley to his wife’s apology, “ from *hour* clock being too fast; it was striking *he* six, when the hour was *honly* *alf* past five.”

(“ What a goose, then,” thought I, “ you were to come, when you knew your clock too fast!”)—I continued, addressing Mrs. S. in her own style

—“Nay, I am sure I am most happy you are come. I consider it so pleasant, my dear Mrs. Sawnley, to feel that one’s friends are glad to see one—there is so *much* insincerity in the world....”

“You’re right, Miss Mirerbul,” said Mr. Sawnley.

“Yes, Miss Mirabelle,” rejoined his fair rib, sighing; “there is, indeed, it is to be regretted, too much: I am always saying so to Michael—am I not, dear Michael?”

“Yes, my dear, so you *hare*,” replied the oafish Mr. Sawnley, and was going to add something more, when his interesting observation was stopped short by the entrance of Mrs. Sparks and her two daughters, and a little red-headed urchin, a cousin of theirs, who was passing his holidays at Ringwood Grange. The squire’s lady and myself waddled across the room to greet each other.

“So glad to see you, Mrs. Sparks,” I said, curtsying to herself and her daughters,—“so sorry to find you out the other day when I

called, and Mr. Sparks so *much* indisposed!—
I hope” (shaking my head with much concern)
“he is a little better than he was : and how
do *you* do, Miss Emily, and you, Miss Fanny?”

“I thank you, Miss Mirabelle,” replied Mrs.
Sparks, as she walked towards the couch, curt-
sying to Mr. and Mrs. Sawnley, “Mr. Sparks
is a *little* better than he was, but he is so im-
prudent.”

“Dear ! dear ! what, he still finds the
temptation of wine too strong to be resisted !
Ah ! it is a sad thing !”

“No, Miss Mirabelle, I did not allude to
that exactly ; I was referring to his imprudence
in going out and getting wet in the feet—”

“Dear ! tsa ! tsa ! And *when* was he so im-
prudent?”

“Oh ! he is always so ; whenever he has the
slightest respite from the gout, he still persists
in going out with Chedhorn to shoot,—or on
horseback,—in all weathers !—and that chills
him, *you know*, and he takes cold—and then—”

“His gout comes on again—and he is laid

up: tsa ! tsa ! Very sad, that, Mrs. Sawmley ?”
I continued, turning to that lady.

“ Oh ! very sad, indeed !” she replied.

“ Upon my word, so I was a thinking^{he} !”
rejoined the reverend Michael.

“ There it *is*, you see, Miss Mirabelle !”
continued Mrs. Sparks,—whose language, I
need scarcely remark, bespoke her a completely
country-bred woman.

“ Yes, Papa is very imprudent, that we all
say !” observed the Misses Emily and Fanny.

“ Now only think,” continued their sage
mamma, “ of this,—Miss Mirabelle: it was pour-
ing cats *and* dogs in *such* a way ! Well ! Mr.
Sparks had but just left his gouty chair and
his ease-and-comfort. ‘ *I must* go out,’ says he.
‘ My dear Mr. Sparks !’ said I.—‘ No, my dear,
it is no use talking,’ says he.—‘ Well, if you *do*
chuse to get another fit,’ said I, ‘ you are the best
judge, I suppose ; but you may *rally* just as well
put off shooting such a wet day as this.’—‘ Pooh !’
says he, ‘ I shall be sheltered in the wood,
whilst I and Chedhorn are popping at the hares.’
—‘ Well,’ said I, ‘ you know best, and’

(“ Dear, dear ! tsa ! tsa ! tsa ! ” we all ejaculated :) “ out he went, and ”

Here my lacquey, Tom, interrupted the continuation of this interesting narration, by squeaking out the name of “ Mrs. Quibble, Mum ! ”

In toddled, led by a maid, poor Madam Quibble, upon whose blindness I have already observed, as well as upon her deafness ; which, poor creature ! rendered her a most tiresome companion. She mumbled out an excuse that she was sorry Mr. Quibble had been unable to accompany her, on account of his engagements, which consisted in answering letters from the agents of some old clients in London.

I did not much, in my own mind, regret Mr. Quibble’s absence, when I bethought me of that little piece of intelligence which I had failed in extorting from him, and now flattered myself that I might possibly be able to pump out of his wife. If Mrs. Q.’s company at my cottage that evening had not held out these laudable expectations, I should have been equally satisfied that she,

as well as her husband, should have stayed at home. My whole party being now assembled, let the reader pause awhile with myself, to admire them.

Mr. Sawnley might altogether be proud of his wife; though she had no great reason to be proud of him. She was dressed in a white gown with flounces at the bottom, but unfortunately, as the gown was somewhat short, and Mrs. Sawnley not too tall, nor too slim, it imparted to her a dowdyism of appearance which might have been, by a more becoming length of dress, if not wholly avoided, at any rate considerably lessened. The ankle which was disclosed, was such an one as might be expected in the person of one who was of a "country breed," as Mrs. Sawnley was;—accustomed to splash through the mud, and hoist her limbs over bars, gates, and rails from her infancy. Round her neck she wore a flimsy tarnished gold chain, to which was appended a cornelian heart. This, I understood, had been a nuptial present from her dear Michael.

Long white kid gloves, and a large old blue paper fan, bordered with gilt paper, completed the decorations of Mrs. Sawnley's dress. As to her person and complexion, I have spoken of it already.

The Squire's lady, too, was a good deal of what is called in the country the "cart-breed" (I have learnt that term from extracts given in the newspapers from sporting authorities.) Her daughters took after their mamma in figure, shape, gait, countenance, complexion, manner—every thing. Mamma was dressed in a sky-blue gown; no sleeves did she wear, but tucks very much drawn up at the shoulders, so that, for the admiration and jealousy of the whole female portion of my party—that is, of myself and Mrs. Sawnley (luckily for her, in this instance, Mrs. Quibble was blind)—she disclosed a pair of arms not remarkable for symmetry or delicacy. I need not say, that she displayed an ankle which made Mrs. Sawnley's dwindle either into a spindle or bodkin-case by its side. Her head being large, the proportions of her

cap were portentous, and were rendered more so by the prodigiously large bows of blue riband with which the cap was set off.

The two "young ladies" wore, in becoming uniformity, white dresses of gauze over pink slips. They were the exact image of their mamma, their hair white, and their eye-brows white:—their complexion freckled, and their figure built on the substantial plan. To be too particular in the description would be ill-natured, so I shall merely observe that their head-gear was characterised by a profuse fall of small curls, dangling down on each side their faces, and a preposterous gilt, or pinch-beck, or perhaps mosaic-gold comb, on the crown. The stay-bones protruded too much in the front, and the dress was not sufficiently pinched in at the sink of the back to set off the figure to the greatest advantage.

Mrs. Quibble was dressed all in black, with a red shawl thrown over her shoulders: if it had not been for this glaring addition, she would have been by no means ill-suited to per-

sonate a "Mother St. Ursula" on the stage, in some mysterious melodrame,—so stiff was her carriage, so slow was her step, so motionless her features. She wore a large necklace of black beads, of carved wood and stained: her cap rivalled in size that of Mrs. Sparks, and was duly decorated with huge bows of black riband.

As to my own appearance, I have already observed, how much, fretting had conduced to make me thinner: so far from picking up flesh, I rather think I grow more and more skinny. The points and angles of my face make me forget the soft outline that my features once wore But it is of little avail regretting what we once were—if a certain person relieves me from the anxiety I at present feel, and behaves as he should, I hope yet to be told by my glass that I am once again something like that which I have been.

My dress this evening was of grey silk, with long sleeves; a cap, from beneath which hung my sandy ringlets; and white satin shoes. I

hope I may be excused a little vanity, if I say that I was decidedly the only distinguished-looking person in the room. It will be considered vanity if I give any farther description of myself, since I have already done so above.

My reader recollects the portrait given some little time ago, of poor Mr. Sawnley: if his ordinary bearing and gait bespoke him a boor, and his look a loon—these qualities were, on the present occasion, rendered ten times more strikingly apparent than usual. The presence of such an august assembly, notwithstanding his wife was in the way to keep him in countenance, occasioned the reverend bumpkin some little embarrassment. So to relieve him, I set himself and Mrs. Sparks's nephew to talk together.

I now proposed to my friends a turn or two in the garden: it was a beautiful evening, and the setting sun was shooting his rays in all their lustre, over a ridge of hills that bounded our prospect. I wished to let my guests see how neatly my garden was kept up; and the re-

marks that we mutually interchanged in the course of our promenade, and in the festivities subsequently, will form a most faithful sample of the "conversation" of such gentry as frequently form the society of a country village. In a word, it may be comprised in the following interesting list of subjects—the sprouting of the young green leaves, the depth of snow in the preceding winter, the colour of a cow, the richness of an Alderney's cream, the distance of the next market-town, the annoyance of the swallows' nests under the windows, the fierceness of the farmer's lurcher, the fatness of his pigs, the plumpness of his chickens, the neatness of his rick-yard; the promise held out by the spring of a good fruit year, the apprehensions of blight to the corn from the east winds, the number of birds shot by the Squire himself last season, the audacity of the poachers, and some few other such pretty Arcadian topics.

Mrs. Sawnley this evening, as usual with her, when not put out of her way, showed herself one of those acquiescent persons that turn like

weathercocks, whichever way the gale of your remark may impel them. This amiable and complying mood will be observable from the remarks that now fell from her.

“How very pretty your garden is, Miss Mirabelle: we have nothing belonging to the Parsonage House that can at all—in the least degree in the world—equal it. I must say, it is one of the *very very* prettiest that I know in the whole neighbourhood round.”

“Well now, I quite agree with you, Mrs. Sawnley,” rejoined Mrs. Sparks; “I think Miss Mirabelle’s garden remarkably pretty.”

“Yes,” I continued, “I am glad to find most of my friends pleased with my garden—those hollyhocks form such a pretty variety.”

“Mr. Sparks does not like them; but I think with you, that they serve to form a variety,” observed the Squire’s lady.

“Now, dear me,” said Mrs. Sawnley, “I was saying the other day I did not like them; but I think now they are *excessively* cheerful, *especially* the buff-coloured ones. We have some,—but then they are of rose-colour—not a *quar-*

ter so pretty or lovely as that pale buff—according to my taste.”

“ I think entirely with you, Mrs. Sawnley,” I replied; “ there is to *me* such a *peculiarly* interesting *character*, if you understand me, in those tall stems and their buff blossoms: but how does *your* garden go on?—I must ‘just step up’ some day, and look at it.”

“ I shall be delighted, I’m sure, my dear Miss Mirabelle; you may give us a hint how to improve one or two things about it,” replied Mrs. Sawnley; “ but the mice eat up all our peas—every one, I declare.”

“ And ours too,” rejoined Mrs. Sparks.

“ And the slugs eat up our strawberries,” continued Mrs. Sawnley.

“ Dear me !” said I.

“ So it is with ours!” exclaimed Mrs. Sparks.

“ Mischievous creatures !” I observed; “ but why do you not strew something over the pea-beds, to kill the mice at least; for as to the slugs there is no getting rid of them.”

“ Why we *do* all that we can, do not we, Mi-

chael?" said Mrs. Sawney to her husband—"do you recollect what it is the gardener puts on the pea-beds to destroy the mice?"

"*h*I declare *h*I don't exactly know," answered the booby Mich.; "but *h*I 'm thinking *he* that *hour* gardener strews chipped fern and lime on the beds."

Whilst Mr. Sawney was answering this important question of his wife's, I was addressing myself to old Mrs. Quibble, who leant on my arm; and received from her an answer which had nothing on earth to do with the question which I had been clamouring in her ears. This answer was of some such importance as this—"It is *very* pleasant out here in the garden; I *do* enjoy the country so much after the confinement of a town life."

"I should think so, indeed," I replied; when, recollecting the subject of my curiosity, I continued—"Oh, my dear Mrs. Quibble, allow me to say one word with you . . ." (as I led her down a walk in an opposite direction to that which the rest of the party were pursuing,

and where I could speak loudly in her ear, without letting the others know what I might say to her.) “Do let your visits to my cottage be as frequent as you can make them ; it will give me the greater pleasure. You do not know, perhaps, that I am an old acquaintance and client of Mr. Quibble’s, before you became Mrs. Quibble :—by the by, my dear Mrs. Q. Mr. Q. must have thriven surprisingly in the profession, with his talent and industry ?”

All this I said in a distinct voice, close to the old woman’s ear, so that I made her understand.

“Yes,” she replied, “Mr. Quibble found his profession answer very well.”

“He told me the other day when we met—(it is the first time I have had that pleasure these many years)—what it was, about, that he had realized—it was about—let me see”

“Thirty-thousand pounds, I fancy,” answered the unconscious old lady ; “at least, I do not think it was much more that he considered he had cleared.”

“ Well, that is pretty well, but I fancied he had told me more—but that is a very decent sum too ! Oh dear ! we have strayed away from the rest of the company—let us go back and find them.”

Saying this, I led my old charge back to the engaging group which we had quitted, now that the object of my curiosity had been gratified. Mrs. Quibble and myself found our friends discussing the comparative prettiness of the white and the pink sweet-pea. My taste was referred to, on our coming up to them.

“ They are both so pretty,” said Mrs. Sawney, anxious to flatter the opinions of both parties, “ that I declare I cannot tell which of the two I like the best—which do you think the prettiest, Miss Mirabelle ?”

“ Why, I really can hardly decide—the white is so *very* delicate, yet I like the pink too : if I were to ask Miss Emily Sparks, she would give the preference to the pink,—if I was not mistaken in seeing her at church last Sunday with a bunch of sweet-peas of this colour ?”

“ Yes, so you had, Emily !” observed Mrs. Sparks, “ Miss Mirabelle is right : I remember we were talking on the Saturday evening on this very subject—how odd ! I think we were *then* all agreed upon thinking the pink prettiest.”

“ Yes, mamma, we were ; Sophy was the only one who doubted, and she at last agreed with us.”

“ So I did !” said Sophy.

“ You do not often go to church, I think, Mrs. Sparks ?” I said, in a tone of inquiry ; “ you find it too cold, I fancy, for yourself and your daughters ?”

“ Why—no ! it is not so much the fear of cold that prevents my attendance at church—but, ‘ you know,’ there is poor Mr. Sparks !” . .

“ Dear yes—so there is !” interposed Mrs. Sawnley.

“ I’m sure I regret exceedingly that he is unable to go,” continued Mrs. Sparks, “ for he loses the excellent discourses of Mr. Sawnley.”

“ *h*I thank you, Ma’am, for the compliment,” answered the clergyman : “ *h*I always

like *h*nstructing*he* the poor in their dooties: *h*I don't *h*aim at high-flown *discoorzes*, but *h*adapt myself to the *h*understanding*hes* of my congregation."

"You are most judicious, Mr. Sawnley," replied the Squire's lady, while the affectionate Mrs. Sawnley smiled with approbation at her husband's praise, which was indeed just; for Sawnley, though an oaf in manner and a boor in speech, had gleaned a certain portion of good sense in the course of his education. He was sometimes inclined to be 'pig-headed,' but altogether performed his sacred functions very respectably, and was far superior to either the 'coxcomb' of his cloth, or those presuming persons who affect the 'high-priest.' But to return to the subject of Sawnley's *discoorzes*.

"Yes, Mr. Sawnley is very right," said both the 'young ladies;' "we have heard papa scold at gentlemen for preaching what he could not understand."

("That must be as often as he has ever been to church," thought I.)

“ Oh yes, it is often the case,” observed their mamma : “ nothing is worse than showing off in the pulpit before the poor :—the discourse should always be adapted to their . . . ” (“ *hunderstandinghes*,” I said to myself with a smile *à-la*-Sawnley.) “ understandings and capacity.”

These praises from the Squire’s lady and the fair Emily and Sophy, flattered the reverend gentleman in no small degree, and induced him to indulge in a little innocent vanity, in a remark or two which he proceeded to make.

“ Yes, igh flown *discoorzes* are *halways* *hill-judged* in a village . . . that is my *hopinion*.”

“ Mr. Sawnley, there is one thing,” I observed, “ that I wish you could prevent ; or, at any rate, cause to be diminished.”

“ What may that be, Miss *Mirerbul* ? ” replied the clergyman.

“ Why, if possible, to prevail upon the villagers to give us less of that dreadful noise which they make up in the gallery at church, and call ‘ music.’ ”

“ Yes, indeed, Miss *Mirabelle*,” rejoined Mrs.

Sparks, "it is rather too much to be obliged to sit and be howled at in the way in which we at present are. Mr. Sparks cannot bear it."

"Why it *his* very bad, that *hI* must admit," replied Mr. Sawnley, but what can *hI* do?—*hif* *hI* scold *em* for it, they threaten to dissent!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Sawnley, anxious to corroborate her husband's assertion.

"The carpenter, Crow," continued Mr. S. "declared the other day, that *hif* he was not allowed to sing psalmns at church to the glory *hoff* the Lord, he would go to meeting directly—"

—"And take all the village with him," added the wife.

"Yes, *hif* he went, we should lose our ole choir: his boy plays the violin, and his nephew the bassoon, and *hI*'m thinking *he* that *hif* he left the church, we should have no music at all."

"Oh, dear! how glad papa would be of that!" said Miss Emily Sparks.

“ That he would !” observed Sophia, “ for he says it is worse than a chorus of pigs.”

“ It makes him quite angry,” said their mother.

“ I don’t wonder at it,” I observed. “ Pray does Mr. Quibble enjoy it ?” I continued, speaking tolerably loud in Mrs. Quibble’s ear.

“ Why, indeed, Mr. Quibble *never* goes to church.”

“ Never goes to church !” we all exclaimed, though scarcely loud enough for his lady to hear us.

“ Mr. Quibble,” she continued, “ has not been to church, as I have heard him say, since he was at Trinity College, Cambridge: they used to make him attend chapel so regularly there, that he has never been able to make up his mind to go near the church since.”

A silence of a few moments ensued, which was to me very diverting, especially when my eye fell upon the lubberly serious face of Mr. Sawnley. The silence was broken by him.

“ Where *longhe abits avé* taken place, *hit* is difficult to shake them *hoff* again.”

This charming truism might have been carried to a greater length, were it not that just at that moment Tom came to tell us that tea was ready, upon which I suggested that we had better walk in and rest ourselves.

This was the signal for the commencement of the evening's regale. The two Miss Sparks's ran down the garden to summon their red-headed cousin, who had left the side of Mr. Sawnley some time ago, in order to amuse himself with the frogs and froglings amongst the strawberry beds, where he must by this time have employed himself to his heart's content,—and his stomach's discontent.

In our way to the drawing-room, I promised my party, as they had been talking of music, to indulge them some day with a rehearsal of my cat concert, (which was far superior to the village church music,) with the novelty and harmony of which, I promised them the greatest satisfaction. Mr. Sawnley doubted whether it was not cruel; but I satisfied his scruples so completely, by assuring him that the cruelty consisted chiefly in the alarm occasioned to the

cats, that they suffered no injury, and were amply recompensed for the penance of their performance by additional saucers of milk—that, aided as I was by the rhetoric of his acquiescent wife, he declared himself perfectly ready to come and hear it. As for Mrs. Sparks, she was delighted at the idea; and said she should mention it to the Squire, who, no doubt, would not refuse me his company on such an occasion. One of the tenors, just as we were talking of the instrument of which she formed an eminently melodious key, darted across our path in a rampant attitude, with a fat mouse in her mouth. She was not the delinquent that had devoured my gold fish—(Heavens! how that creature shall be nipped, the next time she performs!)

During tea the conversation was much aided by the topic of Mrs. Lofpane's reputation as a pastry-cook—for her cakes, her buns, and her biscuits.

“Well, I'm sure that cake looks as if it would do her credit,” observed Mrs. Sawney.

“ Suppose you do us the favour to cut it up for us, Mr. Sawnley ?” I said.

“ With pleasure, Miss *Mirerbul* !” replied the polite Sawnley, and commenced dividing the cake, after which he handed it round to us. The first person that tasted it was Mrs. Sparks, —but alack ! she as quickly seemed to wish she had not done so, by making an alarmingly wry face.

“ Oh, dear me !” she cried, “ there is such an odd taste !”

“ What !” I exclaimed, with much concern, “ there has been some fault in the baking—or in the original making, perhaps ?—I hope not ! allow me to taste it.”

I put a little bit into my mouth, which occasioned as wry a distortion of the muscles of my face, as of Mrs. Sparks’s.

“ Ha ! oh dear ! dear ! shocking !” I cried out—“ the eggs cannot have been fresh with which the cake was made—how provoking !

“ That is certain ! I fear there *must* have been some mistake as to the eggs,” observed Mrs. Sawnley.

“ I shall certainly go down to-morrow to the village, and scold Mrs. Lofpane for so shocking a neglect. I am quite distressed, Miss Sparks !” I added, turning to that damsel and her sister.

“ Do not distress yourself about it, Miss Mirabelle,” said Mrs. Sparks; “ I assure you, Emily and Sophy very seldom eat this sort of cake.”

I begged Mrs. Sparks and her daughters to try the plum cake, which happily turned out better than the pound cake. As for the school-boy, he said, “ for his part, he found no fault whatever with the cake, which we all disliked so ;” and went on giving ample testimony of the good faith with which he made the assertion, by munching up the whole of a large piece which he held in his paws, without the least discomfiture as to the taste.

The success of the plum-cake and my own bread-cake amply made up for the failure of the other : the idea of that careless creature, Mrs. Lofpane, making the cake with addled eggs ! The fact is, eggs happening to be rather

dear just at that time, and Mrs. Lofpane happening to have a number upon her hands, thought proper to consume them in this way. I never bought another cake of her, after this highly improper, and I might say, fraudulent, conduct.

The only other incidents worth mentioning, were the circumstances of Miss Emily Sparks staining her dress with the coffee, and her cousin breaking a tooth by imprudently eating a piece of the bread-cake with too great precipitation. I was rather sorry for him—but boys who gobble as he did, must expect these things;—these little matters tended much to make the evening go off with *eclat*, as they excited a strong degree of interest at the moment they happened. So that altogether, with talking of these matters, and discussing the subject of the last thunder-storm, and the consequent unhappy fate of three pigs and an old coach-horse, we had quite an eloquent colloquy.

But it was now nearly time for the party to break up: Mr. Sawnley was obliged to go

home to look over a “charuty sermunt,” as he said, which he was to preach for the benefit of the Sunday school the next morning. Mrs. Quibble hoped I would excuse her infirmities, and permit her to withdraw sooner than she should otherwise have wished. Mrs. Sparks, too, pretended to be anxious to see how the Squire was going on, and the bell was rung for their carriage—“her *ekipige*,” as she always called it: and thus there was a general break-up.

From a scruple of good breeding, I had abstained putting my guests to any inconvenience this evening, by my “little, *innocent*,” inquisitive ways; except only in the instance of the slight question I put to Mrs. Quibble aside in the garden. But I thought, now that I was left with a single gossip or two, I might venture to gratify myself a little: it was too painful a restraint to be obliged to practise forbearance any longer, and I felt that I should accuse myself afterwards, if I suffered the opportunity of indulging my vein for one or two moments,

to escape. There is no one habit that clings to its votaries more closely, or prompts the mind to pursue it with a greater pruriency, than that of asking questions, and fishing for intelligence, though about matters that really do not concern the person questioning in the least. In saying which, I am fully aware that I am reflecting on myself.

Whilst Mrs. Sparks's "ekipige" was being brought round to the door, I ventured to say a few words in my character of a gossip.

"Let me see, Mrs. Sparks, your carriage is a green one, if I remember it rightly, is it not?"

"No, Miss Mirabelle, our 'ekipige' is yellow."

"Oh yes! I remember now—rather dingy, though," I added, smiling—" 'a family coach,' Mrs. Sparks, I suppose? It is agreeable to see families in the country making use of the carriage of their grandfathers, from generation to generation—yours must be pretty respectable on the score of age—to look at it?"

“ Upon my word, Miss Mirabelle,” answered Mrs. Sparks, looking sadly offended, “ our ‘ekipige’ is no ‘family coach,’ as you are pleased to call it: Mr. Sparks has not had it above five years, and we are thinking of ordering a new one this very month.”

“ Five years! come! that is pretty well. A very fair usage for any carriage! By-the-by, Mr. Sparks and yourself are rather shy of going out an airing together in it. I don’t mean to offend, my dear Mrs. Sparks,—but they say—you know but we all know that little jars *will* exist in the best-regulated and happiest families.”

“ I really don’t comprehend you, Miss Mirabelle.”

“ Little jars—yes—slight differences, *will* exist in the best-regulated families, and where tempers are the best. Now, my dear Mrs. Sparks! you must not be angry with me if I were to suggest that I’m pretty near certain that you and Mr. Sparks pass the night yes, yes, separate beds—now, don’t you?”

“ Upon my word, Miss Mirabelle, I cannot answer such questions ; you must excuse me, if I say that I am surprised at your asking about such things.”

“ You’re surely not angry with an intimate acquaintance for asking a slight question or two out of regard for your interests ? It is neighbourly, my dear Mrs. Sparks, and friendly, as *I* think, at least : now, I am sure you would not take it amiss, if I were just to inquire whereabouts poor Mr. Sparks sleeps in the house*—the noise must be dreadful for him below stairs, annoyed as he is with gout.”

“ Really, Miss Mirabelle, I cannot see how it can concern you to know whereabouts Mr. Sparks sleeps : you must excuse me for speaking thus plainly—but I must indeed say, that by asking such questions as these, you impose a great deal of difficulty on the person to whom you address them. If I were to tell you

* In this instance, the Editor can vouch on his *own* authority, that such question was asked, in the pruriency for gossip, as described.—*Ed.*

that he sleeps up one pair of stairs, just on the landing place, to the right hand side, opposite the blue room, close by the clock, do you not perceive to what troublesome and useless details you force me ? I repeat it, you must excuse me if I speak so plainly ; but I must be allowed to say, that inquisitive persons put a constraint and difficulty on those they tease with their impertinence, no less disagreeable than the questions which they ask are idle and profitless to themselves. Come along, Emily ! Sophy, my dear, come !”

Having uttered this philippic, Mrs. Sparks waddled off with her two daughters and her nephew, in a huff ; and left me much amused with the unhappy result of my own impertinent curiosity, gaping and grinning, feeling myself justly catechised, yet willing to console myself by calling Mrs. Sparks a silly captious woman, although I could not, in this instance, conscientiously think her so.

If her lecture to me had any truth in it, it is to be wished that every tiresome, vulgar,

and impertinent gossip, in every village in the country, to which these "Confessions" may chance to come, will be pleased to take a lesson from it.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRIUMPH OF FEMALE DIGNITY; OR, BEHAVING AS A WOMAN OUGHT TO DO.

Two or three months passed on, much in the same way as has already been described. I called on my tenant one morning, and was received very civilly by his wife in their farmhouse, and was assured by her that her husband would be able to make good his promise in a reasonable time from thence.

As Mr. Conroy did not once think of writing to me, I thought it advisable to remind him of me, by letting him hear from me, so I sat down and wrote to him, mentioning how prosperous an aspect my affairs wore, and venturing to hope that the event to which (I trusted) he

would ultimately accede, would not now be very long delayed.

Scarcely had I sealed this letter, and was about to send it to the post-office, when the newspaper, which I that moment took up to look at, brought to my eye the following intelligence:—

MARRIED.

“On Thursday last, the 23d, at Bow Church, Albert James Conroy, of Change Alley, London, to Judith, daughter of Isaac Solomon, the rich Jew-broker, of the same place.”

Conceive at first my surprise!—then the conflict between my grief and rage—the contending passions of sorrow for my abandonment and disappointment, and my indignation at the conduct of him who had thus wound up, by this last act of perfidy, the infidelity of a whole life! These passions raged together, with a vehemence that made my frame shake like an aspen-leaf, and reduced my strength so much, that I fainted.

It was some little time before I recovered, or came to myself: at length I became more calm; this calm, however, was but the slumber in which my fury was husbanded, soon to be poured forth in a volley wrathful as the eruptions of *Ætna*. I sat silent for some time, scarcely believing the intelligence that I read. I then began to meditate on the insult offered to my dignity, to my feminine pride,—independently of the shameful return paid me for my long regard and fidelity.

I rose upbraiding myself for my tears. “They are wasted, they are thrown away,” I cried, “upon such a heartless wretch, such a mean, sordid, fellow as *this*: it is enough to find he mocks at me,—shall I sustain farther degradation by considering his mockery as painful to me, which I shall do, by lamentation?.... No! let the sordid miscreant hug the bags of gold which he has obtained by this new alliance! Let him congratulate himself upon his cunning and worldliness, in shunning the alliance of one, who had not wealth to give him

—the narrow-minded dotard ! Does he not see that this gold he has wedded himself to, must soon be lost to him, without even the chance of its descending to any heir of his ? Can he not feel that, so necessarily approximating to their limit as his days must be, it would have been well to have done one honourable action in his life, before its close—to have afforded a gleam of satisfaction to one unhappy deluded being, whose greatest fault has been that of a misplaced devotion for *him*. But he has no soul ! for what man can say that he has a soul, who has not a *generous* one ? *He* has none then ! no generosity ! If he ever had, he has lost it, by the sordid habits to which he has inured himself. Let him triumph, then, in his paltry alliance !—such a miser would have been no fit connexion for me—no fit alliance for one, liberal in spirit as myself !.... No ! I thank Heaven that he has acted as he has—rather than regret this new perfidy of his—he has dealt a punishment on his own head, by heaping the disgrace of fresh meanness on it.

I scorn him—he should not even tie my ‘shoe latchet,’ if he would. I lothe the recollection of him—his name I execrate. Shall *I* weep who ought to be indignant—who ought to be scornful—who ought to summon up my pride and elevation of mind to my assistance? No! I will not be so unworthy of myself—so ungrateful to Heaven as to forswear those generous resources with which it has endowed me. I will forget I ever knew so vulgar, so sordid a fellow. I will not even communicate with him, to let him know my opinion of his conduct—he is beneath my notice—his vulgar conduct is far too dirty for me to contaminate myself by the slightest interference in it. The Change Alley reptile,—the wretched bridegroom of the daughter of an old clothes’-man! Shall such a fellow as *this*, claim a moment’s attention from me? Shall I even remember him so much as either to feel or to express any farther indignation or scorn for him? No! from this moment I blot him out from my memory, and am a happier, a more free and independent woman

than I was, while still breathing the dingy atmosphere of that hope which his niggard intimations held out to me !”

Such was the firmness with which I finally contemplated the perfidy and meanness of this miserable fellow, the generous spirit of whose youth had been totally expunged by the sordid career of money-making, which he had subsequently prosecuted through life. In the course of things, he must now, at no very great length of time, be severed from all, for which his sordid ambition and dirty toil have struggled. I thought upon that beautifully philosophical passage in Shakspeare, applicable not only to the person of whom I have just been speaking; but to men in general, whose life presents the same sordid career that his does :—those wretched worldlings, who are dead to that which is alone happiness—a liberality of mind, an independence of soul, a freedom of thought ! whose object is not merely to obtain a sufficiency, which may afford them an honourable independence, and admit of their giving scope to noble

and generous feelings ; but who, long beyond the attainment of this necessary point, go on adding heap on heap, without an idea of its use, or the legitimate means it affords of happiness to themselves and others. Pitiab!e are such spirits ! their minds as shackled and confined in the narrow sphere of a sordid calculation, as their bodies are, within the corners where they skulk over the coffers !

CHAPTER XI.

WE BID GOOD-BYE TO THE VILLAGE.

I THREW the letter I had written into the fire, and dismissed the subject of it from my mind. I gave myself no credit for magnanimity, but considered alone, that had I given way to vexation or disappointment, I should have been disgracing myself by an unworthy weakness.

Still when I considered that I had thrown out hints (imprudently, assuredly,) to my village acquaintance, that I was soon to augment my establishment, on the event of a matrimo-

nial alliance, I felt that a disclosure of the frustration of these prospects would entail on me a good deal of ridicule, not only from 'the neighbourhood,' but all the villagers; and though I might have been able to withstand its torrent, yet I deemed it just as well to evade it, and therefore made up my mind to change my place of residence. As I did not conceive that I should ever have any inclination to return to it,—it was not long afterwards sold by my direction.

I was the more influenced in pursuing this line of conduct, since I was determined to make one more effort to rescue myself from my condition of Old Maid, if I could. Such events had happened in the instances of others, situated similarly with myself, and why not in my own instance?

Weighing all circumstances together, I proposed to myself a country-town as the most encouraging field that was now left for me, for the prosecution of my object.

If my spirits had been momentarily shaken, my pride had so effectually buoyed them up

again, that I entered on my new enterprise with an animation and confidence worthy of my best days. I wrote a letter in good spirits to Lady Kate, informing her of the frustration of my late expectations, and the manner in which I had treated it, adding also the plans which I at present had in view.

As I was a great lover of music—(to which taste my domestic concert of cats can bear witness ;)—I bent my views towards settling in a Cathedral town. As Durham was the first that came into my head promising such an object, to Durham I accordingly bent my course.

I left the village without giving any intimation whatever of my movements to my worthy friends, Mrs. Sawnley, Sparks, Quibble, or any of them.

I did not set out on my present expedition without suspicions that the society to which I was about to link myself, would not, in all probability, be the most select: this remained for me to see. Whatever its character might

be, I made up my mind to acquiesce in it, and proceeded on my journey with no less readiness than I now proceed with the Confessions that may characterize my acquaintance with a country town.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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